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THE VAMPIRE

By the same Author

WASTRALLS

THE HEADLAND

THE HAUNTING

THEY GREEN STONES

OR

THE TURN OF A DAY

ETC.

THE VAMPIRE

*A BOOK OF CORNISH
AND OTHER STORIES*

C. A. DAWSON SCOTT



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LOVE MAGIC



LOVE MAGIC

I

"If I go down to the gate I'll maybe see someone."

During the whole of her hardworking yet leisurely day Edith Prin had been alone, and it would be pleasant now that the blackberry jelly had been strained, poured into the unequal-sized jars and bottles and carried to the apple-chamber in the roof, to exchange a word with someone, anyone. Her husband and two stepsons were at Summercourt Horse Fair, so, too, were most of the neighbours—still by now some might be on their way home.

Not many, perhaps, for Summercourt was the event of the year, and for days carts piled high with tents, with the material for booths and stalls and canvas shows, had been converging on the straggling village. One or two had come up from Gipsy Corner and gone past the farm. From the kitchen window—that new big window Farmer had had put in because he wanted more light, when he sat at the end of the table, for his meals—Edith had seen the little quick ponies, the swaying top-heavy loads. She had thought how jolly it must be to go from fair to fair, not merely buying and selling, but helping to amuse the crowds of people. To be behind things, getting ready, taking the money, what an exciting life!

Different, so very different, from the one she led.

She came quickly down from the apple-room. In the days when she had been farm-girl under the first Mrs. Prin she had thought the attic was a terrible bare place. It needed more shelves and cupboards. Why did not one of old Missis's big sons make them for her? If *she* had been the Missis . . .

Now, however, that she stood in Mrs. Prin's shoes and had the three men to look after and clean for, the milk and the chickens to see to and the butter to make, she found she did not care whether there were enough shelves in the apple-chamber for her jams and jellies. In the old hugger-mugger way she had ranged the jars on the table.

And coming out she had left the door ajar for the cat. Tib was a good mouser and there was no life other than Edith's own in the clean scantily furnished house—no, only Farmer and Farmer's two sons, and herself.

The apple-chamber was over the kitchen, but the iron stair led down into the linnhay; and Edith hurried across the blue slate floor to the door. Nothing more, at the moment, that she need do. The kettle, hanging from its thick black chain over the low fire, was singing, supper was laid on the red and blue checked tablecloth, the pigs and chicken had had their meat.

Leaning her elbows on the top of the gate, she looked up the moorland road along which her men would return to her. On either side of it was waste land with an occasional field which, hardly won

from the downs, still showed outcrops of rock. The house from which she was come was of clob ; that is, clay taken from a wet meadow and after being strengthened with trodden-in stones, set up to stiffen in the sun. A clob house with a grey ring of outhouses—outhouses built of the rock itself.

Edith, being young, had wished to go to Summer-court, but it had not occurred to Farmer, being middle-aged, to take her. He was not going for the fun of the Fair, but to buy a new cart-horse ; and she—she was a married woman. What did she want at such places ?

Very shortly after their marriage he had forgotten that Edith was not the woman with whom he had lived for so many years ; he had even, every now and then, called her ' Alice.' What did a name matter or indeed a woman, so long as the work was done and his home a comfortable place to return to at the end of the day ?

Edith, although a wife, had more to do than when she was a maid. She had been help to a bustling mistress, now she was the mistress. Farmer thought that if she wanted someone to give a hand she would say so. It was nothing to do with him ; and as a matter of fact, Edith liked being by herself. She could undertake great satisfying pieces of work and carry them through ; yet there was something—something that she lacked. She was not certain about that something, but even the work—and she had just finished a crazy-patch counterpane of bright silks and velvets—even that did not content her. Not altogether. To-day she felt even more restless

than usual. She had wanted to go to the fair. That must be it. As she stood with her arms on the warm wood, a still figure in the afternoon quiet of moorland and setting sun, she was thinking of the swings, the booths, and the little stages inside the booths; and under her thought something tugged at her.

If there had been anything to keep her at home! Any pleasant reason! But the old wooden cradle stood like—like lumber, in the attic. As she put down her tray of pots she had glanced at it.

She would dust it—cane sides, carved head, rockers. While she had been setting the jelly-jars in a row the dusty cradle had been in her mind. Bob, the third of old Missis's sons, had been the last to lie in it and he was a man grown. For over twenty years it had waited under the eaves, ready . . .

She had added the last jar to the labelled company and had stood for a moment, hesitating.

She could not go over to the cradle and dust it. She could not touch it. Instead she had turned and gone very quickly away.

When she reached the gate, she was breathless as if she had been running hard, running away. But—

Foolish of her to be thinking long of the crowds of people, the fine horses, the stir. Last year Bob had taken her. Now he was in America and there was no one who thought of her as other than a sort of churn that turned the rough of every day into comfort. Well and 'twas truth. She was the woman of the house—only that. Ridiculous to be

so expecting. The boys were kind enough, but they had their sweethearts. And Farmer? Over fifty, and had been married to old Missis since the early twenties. Edith had known what he was. When Missis died she had thought it would not be right for her to stay on without another woman in the house, and she had given notice. He had been a bit vexed, had muttered something about "Getting silly ideas in your head," and had asked her to stop on as his wife. To stop on? Edith had been taken by surprise. She had not wished to marry him, but could not think of any reason to refuse. Her way was to take on any job that offered. That kept you busy and brought you, before you knew it, to the end of the day.

She had never had a fancy chap, and everybody got married some time or other. Farmer was all right, a fine man for his time of life; still she could have wished things had fallen out a little differently.

By now he must be on his way back with the new horse. No reason to stay for the dancing, and he did not approve of theatres and the like. Joe and Charlie would take their girls, but the father, grunting an amiable disapproval, would come home. Tired he would be. More tired than after a heavy day's ploughing. He could not stand the bobbing up against people—all the noise of the fair.

Liked the drovers and dealers he did, and the other farmers, but he couldn't abide the people of the booths and whirligigs, the tinklers and gypsies. A good solid man, Farmer, and could not stand

anything which was not as solid as himself. That was—Farmer ; and she was used to his ideas and ways.

Her thought went back for a moment into the house, the kitchen. The meat and vegetable stew with its pastry roof was gently simmering in the oven under the fire of mixed coal and turf. He would be wanting his supper, and after it he would sit in shirt-sleeves and stocking-feet, nodding off to sleep over a pipe till it was time for bed. It would not be long before he came round the bend of the road.

For some time she had been growing aware of sound ; an unbelievable breath of melody, hardly heard ; a note faint but clear ; a sequence of notes. This sound was the merest vibration—a hint of far-off rainbow music, and slight as a bubble.

The tiny clear notes pierced the silence like arrows, and their quality was crystalline. They struck through Edith's inattentive ear into her consciousness, awakening it before she knew that she heard.

She believed that she was imagining the notes, but they were in her mind, her heart, a tinkle of faery sound and—ah ! disturbing. No, then, she really heard, and they were the far-away notes of a tune. It was unknown to her, that tune, but it came from another heart and it called.

Who could be making the wild music ? She knew all the dwellers on the downs, had heard them sing at harvest gatherings, in chapel, and sitting round when she had thrust in a stick of furze and

the turf-fire had a blaze to it. But this voice ! Strange to her, it was, oh, strange and lovely.

Hidden by the bend of the road, where an arm of rocky hill was thrust out by the moor, the singer was sending forth witch-notes that grew in volume. He must be coming along the road—coming from Summercourt.

A bunch of long-tailed Goss Moor ponies came round the corner. The little animals were fastened together, and from the halter of the midmost hung a rope. A man who was following at their heels held the end of it. The ponies advanced slowly, feeding as they came, and the man took advantage of their occupied progress to pipe his troubling music.

He would be some dealer on his way from Summercourt at one end of the downs to Bodmin at the other. No one she knew—and yet—

Her dim dissatisfactions were hushed to a listening. They thronged a threshold, going out. To be so young and yet married ! To have married without knowing the burning uncertainties of courtship. To have inherited another woman's children, grown men at that, and to have her own arms empty. These and—and something she wanted, although she could not give it substance, something just over the edge of the world—perhaps not even there.

The flute-player, he also was seeking. His music held not merely yearning, but a demand. That something of whose existence she was not altogether sure was real to him. He had a safe knowledge,

and a man has more than that. He has rights, and the music claimed them with a primitive fierceness that stabbed at other wild hearts.

Edith dared not move. She told herself it was because her doing so might startle the ponies, unbroken creatures, capable of clearing the nearest hedge and making for the open moor. She could not move, a languor was in her limbs—yet it was not spring. Motionless she leaned against the gate, and through the poignantly clear, compelling notes, came the crisp tearing of grass as the ponies fed, came the quickened throbbing of a pulse.

The man would not see her, for a still figure is like a bit of the landscape ; but she would see him. An odd sort of dealer this, to be playing himself home from Summercourt. The men she knew might whistle, even sing—but play the flute ?

Then she saw.

The man was a gipsy.

A mile or two further on, below the fork of the road, lay Gipsy Corner. The last, on that side, of the rough land, it had a spring and was never without a sprinkling of queerly-shaped tents. The straggling community of moormen grumbled yet bore with them, for the gipsy nibble, like that of the rick rats, was hardly felt by the prosperous farmers.

As the ponies straggled past the gate, Edith ventured a quick glance.

The glance—to her hot confusion—was met and held. All the blood in her body rushed to protest. She had not expected, she had not guessed . . .

The gipsy took the pipe from his lips and his eyes said he had been long aware of her.

Although the afternoon was waning the light was still good. It showed her to be a tall, ripe woman with a grave face. Her lips were red and the eyes under straight black brows were soft. Gentle was she, kind, yet one who took life proudly.

His face—so dark, skin and hair, that it made her, though of moorland colouring, appear fair—was in shadow, but the western brightness fell on his lithe body, the body of a snake, of a wrestler, and she realized without seeing, that he carried himself differently from the men she knew—the strong, heavy countrymen. His glance, too, it had a quality. It was that of one who comes to instant decisions and who does not claim but takes. To Edith it was as if the piercing flame of it lit up her heart, making clear to him and herself her dissatisfaction.

And with it entered fear.

The gipsy lost a step, but he, too, had seen the fear. With a quick, proud lift of the head, he went past her. His flute was back at his lips—but he knew now to whom he was piping.

II

The mare Jabez Prin had bought at Summercourt was a bargain. While he ate his tea he talked of it, and talked on afterwards. He sat in the old chair that had been his father's and he told over

the animal's points. He repeated the story of his deal, of how he had got the better of Hedley Bragg, and Edith turned her grave face towards him. Farmer was glad of an ear. He remembered another bit of the bargaining. He had given Hedley a good answer, so he had, but he had not laughed—then. Edith should have cried out and congratulated him, seeing him for the shrewd man he was. She was a good wife to him, but when he was in a jolly mood—

He left off talking and began to think of the mare. Presently he took her good points with him into a dream, and Edith was free to pick up the stocking she was knitting and go to the door. The moon would give her enough light, and she liked to sit on the step.

The covering night—the night which had been made for the young folks and their courting, and she sitting there alone. Farmer—but she could not abear to think of him. His breath was coming in audible puffs. Rising, she pulled the door to, behind her. She was free—free as the little shadow slipping across the yard in search of food, free as the things that had their holes and nests—their little dark homes—on the moor. Free, for the moment!

Best not to think of what freedom might have meant. She began to knit, her glance on the dark wool and shining needles. Her back was against the worn wood of the doorpost, and in her ear was the quaver of owls, the sleepy cluck of a chicken. A still night.

Was there yet another sound? She paused in her quick knitting. She knew that she should not pause to listen, that she should keep her mind fixed on her work. She was turning the heel and might make mistakes, yet—she could not help herself. From afar off came that faint but recollected sequence of notes.

Ah, no, she was remembering, and she must not remember. Poignant notes . . .

The sound was growing in intensity, not coming nearer but taking on a passionate quality. Her hands fell idle in her lap and she stared out into the night.

Later she heard the music in her dreams, and waked to tell herself that she was haunted by a tune. She had not heard it, she had only—remembered. She belonged to be ashamed of herself, thinking twice of tunes and such. A settled woman, she was, married this three year to the strongest farmer that side of Bodmin.

In the evening, as usual, she set an old cushion on the doorstone and settled to her knitting. All day she had turned from one task to another, filling her mind with the husks of household work, pressing them into the corners. Something she could not see, but which she knew was there, lurked in those corners, and the husks were to stifle them. By evening the house was terribly swept and scrubbed and polished, and she should have been too tired to stand, but she was only restless.

Not a breath of air. She began to knit feverishly, but now that the heel was turned she had not to

keep her thoughts on the stocking. How could she when he was making the magic music ?

Edith Prin was the child of a labourer. Born in the elm-shadowed village, her simple history was of school on week-days, chapel on Sundays, until she had gone as servant to Mrs. Prin at the Big Farm. She knew of nothing but the great hills and the folks who made a living on them. As she sat with the moonlight turning the countryside into a world of black and white, she wondered why she had been in such a hurry to marry ?

The music from far away was troubling her quietude of a married woman—was giving her a new knowledge. There was a power in such simple things as a hand held, a touch, a look. She had perhaps guessed at this, but she had not known it as she did now, known it with a sweet fire in the breast, a fire which burnt yet did not burn.

Who was the flute-player ? If it were the gipsy, why should he be piping in the hush of the night ? Not even to herself would she say—‘ to whom ? ’

Gipsy Corner was fully three miles from Big Farm. Above it the road forked, going up to Bodmin, going down to Triggyveal. Beyond the fork on the left was the trampled bare space of the encampment, the low, brown, grey and tawny tents. Moorland air is clear. If it were the gipsy he was, no doubt, piping to his fellows.

The music had in it no thought of her. Of course not. What was she thinking ? Let her go on with her knitting.

Yet the needles slipped from her hands and when

she found them in the dust beyond the doorstep, she felt too restless to continue twisting the wool, twisting and thrusting. Too restless to sit on in the moonlight. Piping, was he, to those other gipsies ?

Little clouds were riding like white witches across the sky, driven they were, and she too. 'Twas, of course, that she was over-tired. She would go upstairs.

Farmer was already abed. Good heavy man, he worked hard in his leisurely way, and ate well, and slept well. Edith stood for a moment looking down on his broad brown-red face, and her young heart was bitter.

Blowing out the candle she went over to the window and pushed it open. The music was still floating towards her through the blue space between earth and sky, was still falling on her heart like one of those showers in spring under which the seeds swell to their first leaves. Her window faced east, and with the change from mean-tempered dark to pallor of dawn the sounds ceased and the burning in her breast died away and she realized that she was tired.

She crept to the big bed and lay down at the extreme edge, lay there unhappily, and at last fell asleep.

III

Joe came in to supper with the news that two of the young cockerels had disappeared, and Jabez Prin clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

"Too many gippos down to the Corner. Time some of they went up country. I reckon the Downs has had its share of'n."

Edith had a vision of the gipsy-folk busy with their own affairs, making plans for fairs and for taking goods—baskets, mats, tin-cans—along the unfrequented roads. The women would go up to this lonely door and that, and the farmer's wife would be glad of a new kettle or a mended saucepan. Further on the little cart would stop by the road and the gipsies make a fire in the open, and hang a pot over it, and later find good sleep under the stars.

Charlie, Prin's other son, looked up from his plate. "Funny thing you telling about they gipsies. I've seen one hanging about here the last day or two."

"I wonder what he is after?" Joe said, and Edith felt the burn of her blood.

"You may depend he won't be after work," and the men laughed. "I bet a shilling he knows what has become of those cockerels."

"Queer chap, too." Charlie was courting one of Hoblyn's daughters, and Hoblyn had a farm on the hill above Triggyveal. He went up there evenings and sat with her on the courting-bench outside the house door till it was time for going home-along. "Every night when I pass I see'n setting on the Blasted Oak. What do you think chap's doing?"

"I can't tell 'ee."

"Why, he's making music. Set there by the hour he do with his old flute."

"After some woman, I expect," grunted Mr. Prin, and Edith's heart swelled. What things people said, and what bad minds they had. After a woman, when he was only playing to—well, only playing.

"He baint then, for he'm always by hisself—and that music of his'n—" Charlie paused. He had felt it as a magic fluting. "Almost make your heart stand still, so it do."

"Aw—get away."

"If the man sets on the Blasted Oak," said Mr. Prin, splitting a bread bun in order to spread it with cream and treacle, "you do know where to find him. Don't like they stags going like that."

His sons knew what he meant but gave no sign. "Mischievous dragons, don't take nothing they can't reach," grumbled Joe, but without rancour. "I s'pose 'twas they set fire to Colicot's mowhay last year."

Edith interposed, "'Twadn't proved they done it."

"Who could have done it else?"

"Anybody setting on the hay smoking."

"And who d'yer think would set there besides a gipsy? Decent man sets indoors."

"Don't want for'n to fire our ricks." Jabez Prin stood up, spoke with authority, an authority which his sons, who were as easy-natured as had been their mother, would not dream of disputing. "You boys had better lay wait for'n to-night and learn him not to come where he baint wanted."

Edith's face grew hot. She wasn't afraid of Farmer. "Two to one?" she said. "Tedn't fair."

Prin looked as much surprised as if one of his cows had run at him. "Nonsense," he said, "for varmint's like they anything's fair." His voice told her she had interfered in a matter that concerned the men. It warned her, but she was beyond caring. Two to one, and they great chaps like Joe and Charl? She pushed back her chair in a sudden fume.

"I be going out."

The three faces turned in surprise. "Where be going this time o' day?"

"Over to Cranza. Mrs. Colicot asked me to call in."

"'Tis pretty and laäte for 'ee to go traipsing over there."

Farmer had a dim recollection of times when his first wife had been foolish-like—set on having her own way. Those times had been when—and he looked at Edith with sudden sharp understanding. A pity, though. At his time of life, children about a house? Well, well, if it was to be, he must make the best of it. "Better stop home till the morning," he said, but the authority was gone out of his voice.

"Stop home?" cried Edith in sudden upheaval. "For all any of you care I mightn't go outside the door from one end of the year to the other."

She had been the good housewife, pouring out for them the tea she had brewed, now her face was flushed and her eyes shining and they—poor chaps, old and young—had done nothing to bring about this alarming change. They stared sheepishly til

her husband turned for his pipe. "Well, well," he grumbled, "go on with 'ee and see you don't get caught in one of they sinky-pits to Water Park." But she was moorland bred. He was not really afraid of her getting bogged in the marshy ground by the river.

Edith did not stop to clear the table. The neat habits of her life had been broken off short. She ran up to her room, and glancing—for sympathy—in the small square looking-glass on the chest of drawers, was for the moment taken aback. An unaccountable rose warmed her cheek, a light starred her deep eyes. Must be the anger she had felt . . .

She was no longer angry, but she meant to go. She could not stay, knowing—

He, so innocently piping and her great stout stepsons strolling up the road, picking a quarrel with him—perhaps because of the music—and then, two to one . . .

Impossible to sit at her knitting when she might warn him. Considering all things, she belonged at least to do that. When your heart is beating quickly and hard, 'tis difficult to think, so it is. Also she forgot her hat, went hurrying out into the dusk. . . .

Her knees were trembling as if she had been buffeted by a storm wind, yet around her the land lay in its September rest, the shorn and cropped land. On each side the hedges fell away, leaving open moor. Every blade of the fine grass was threaded with silvery beads, every leaf held a treasure of diamonds, and from the brambles

came the odour of ripe fruit. Edith had come out of the storm into the quiet of night. Her knees no longer trembled and she walked quickly, but not altogether as if she knew what she was about.

IV

The Blasted Oak, a stripped white skeleton of a tree, stood at the corner of Farmer's last field. The road ran on to the fork. On one side was marshy ground, over which a meandering path led to Cranza, a farm hidden among the hills.

Edith paused by the oak. He had not been at Gipsy Corner when he made his music. He had come west along the road, and had come as far as he might.

A branch that would serve as a seat stood out from the trunk, stood out squarely, and Edith went up to it, looking, and at last venturing to touch it. A smile came to her eyes. He had sat there. Night after night . . .

Why had he come up from Gipsy Corner, come as far as the oak, and sat on its peeled white bough? What had been his—hopes? She knew for he had voiced them in his piping. She knew, and her heart so burned in her breast that she almost dropped where she stood.

Suddenly she laid her hands on her breast, laid them over the inner stir that was pain and—something more. No matter for what the gipsy hoped and felt, she was come out to warn him. Only for that. He must not come to the oak. Joe

and Charl were going to "lay wait" for him and break his magic.

She did not think of the gipsy as a man like those she knew, the men for whom she worked and with whom life was prose. She saw him as a being half-piskie, who belonged to a world that was glamorous, not altogether workaday. That he stole cockerels, cheated over horses, fired an occasional rick, set him apart from everyone with whom she had hitherto come into contact. It did not occur to her to mete out blame. He was different, and that—perhaps—was what made him interesting.

Joe and Charlie should not find him at the oak.

She dropped back to the road and walked on quickly. On each side was the rough warm-tinted moor. Afar off, each in a surround of grey buildings, nestled an occasional farm. Edith knew the people who dwelt in the lonely homesteads, knew them as drab lives in which she took no particular interest. She was used to them as she was used to the animals about; and cared little whether she ever saw them again. They were a part of life, a part of the moor—all right, only—they did not help. In spite of everything and everybody she was like the little pigs when they run squealing about the sty. Empty and hungry they are, and will not cease their racket till she bring out the steaming bucketful and pour it into the trough.

She did not belong to be thinking of her own troubles when she had came out on another's business.

She stepped out, coming before long to the fork where the road dipped to Triggveal and rose to

Bodmin. To the left it ran sharply down past Gipsy Corner, but she did not intend to go further. If he were going to the Blasted Oak that evening, he must come up the road. Edith stopped by the signpost—to find regret awaiting her.

Why had she bothered to come? What business was it of hers? A man had chosen to sit in the hush of the evening and play his flute, but what of it? If he had been a friend of hers, or even an acquaintance, if he had been one of the people who lived on the scattered farms, the boys with whom she had been at school; but this was a stranger, a man to whom she had never spoken. Waiting at the fork of the road, with the dark flowing down the western slopes and along the eastern sky, she cried shame on herself for meddling in what did not concern her.

What was the gipsy man to her?

A wicked wanton, she was. No, no, she had come to warn him. But why *him*? Wasn't the world full of poor souls whom she might have helped, why go in search of this one? But, but—Joe and Charl—two to one, and such stout fellows.

Her heart was flowering in distress for the stranger.

Ah, the foolishness of it! He would mistake her reason for coming and she would be shamed.

About the foot of the white signpost was a blackness of bushes. They grew, these bushes, grew sharply, and she was looking into his eyes. She had not heard his steps, yet he was there. The suddenness of his appearance deprived her of breath.

“You—” she stammered, and tried to remember why she was come. He must not think—

“I’m come to tell ’ee you must not go to the Oak to-night.”

The dusk was not too thick for him to perceive the beauty—the new beauty—of her face. Roses can flame and eyes be brighter than the faintly burning stars. “Why?” he said, his fierce eyes taking what was his, his fiercer heart coming to its quick decision.

Her breath caught, yet she was gaining confidence. “Joe and Charl—Farmer’s sons—they be going to lay for ’ee.”

The dark face grew sullen. “Wadn’t doing no harm.”

“They don’t understand—” She could not tell him of the lost cockerels.

A swift change came over the man. “*You* do?”

The earth rocked and the heavens were opened. It was true then what she had—dreamed.

He at the Blasted Oak and she at her window. Secret hopes, wild longings. His look had torn away the insincerities with which she had cloaked her impulse; and, suddenly, she realized that she must get away, go back. Behind, along the road, lay safety—the thing she knew. She must command her feet, must go quickly.

The gipsy put out a small brown hand and, without knowing how it came to pass, she found that he had lifted her face to his. For a breathing space she leaned on his breast, clipped close and, while his hard lips held hers, an old thing died and

a new was born. The dead fell away into its place and the dark covered it, but the new . . .

"Come," he said, but from the depths of her nature rose in answer the cry of the settled peoples. "You are of us," they cried, "you cannot go. His people are the wild people, we are the farm and house people. You must stay with us."

The gipsy fitted the pieces of his flute together and she knew that he would play the tune that put a spell upon her. "Oh no," she begged him. She must flee from the adventure of life, go back to the known and safe. She must obey those voices, growing every moment more insistent. "The roof over your head, the food on the linhay shelf, the fire under a chimney. You must turn and go home."

He blew out his wild notes, claiming her for the solace of his pain, teaching her, commanding, and Edith heard. Home—it was where they two should lie down to sleep, in a dry ditch or under a bit of canvas. Fire—he had lighted a fire in her heart which made all things clear. He only, of all men—he who had lighted that fire—might fill her arms.

He had turned into the Bodmin road, the road that led over the hills into the world.

Trembling violently she took one step—it was the music in her feet—a following step and then . . . then another.

The gipsy put out his hand, and together they walked out of the old life into a new world, going towards the day.

“AND BEHOLD A WHITE HORSE”

“AND BEHOLD A WHITE HORSE”

THAT the men of the Church Town at Trezannion were out after supper, leaning against the old wall and smoking, was probably due to the night being moonlit. They stood—Tavis Bennett, the smith; Tristram Old, lover of all women with the exception of his wife, Carrie; and Alec Tremain, hired man to Killanogue—and they talked of witchings and ill-wishings and the power of the “old fellow what charm.”

Behind the wall rose the remains of the cross which had called the tribes to council before ever there was a church; and about it the generations of men slept to the lulling of Atlantic tides.

“Someone riding,” said the blacksmith, who could recognize the trot of every horse in the parish; and on the still air fell the faint beat of hoofs.

“Doctor wanted to Pleasant Springs,” suggested Old. “Wonder if it will be another little maid?”

The smith shook his head. “Not Brenton’s mare. Her cloppity-clop have a catch in it where she staked her off hind leg two year back.”

Church Town stood high and the roads were a tracery of white on the country side. Between the black hedges something still afar off moved, and the sound of his coming grew. The smith looked puzzled. “Sure I do not know who it is . . . a

white horse, too. Tubby Gregor have a grey, but . . ."

Tremain moved uneasily. The sound of this riding made him think of the old man at Killanogue—alone since the death of his last child.

No reason to think of Mr. Strongman, for as far as Tremain knew, the old man had no friends outside the parish.

At the cross-roads the strange rider drew rein for a moment.

"Not sure of his way," commented the smith, but the white horse turned uphill.

"It is for one of us," murmured Tremain, and thought the mild air colder than it had been.

"Us? Your grandmother!" they cried sceptically.

He thought again. "But after Church Town there is only the bay."

"Aw—man is out of his road."

The horse took the ascent, a sharp one, as if fresh to his journey, but on reaching Church Green, the rider hesitated as if again at fault, and the men leaning against the low wall shifted in their places, watching.

Against the pale horse, the rider, his face hidden by the brim of his hat, showed black, a light but impenetrable bulk. His voice came hollow from the darkness above his cloak. "I believe there is a short way to Killanogue across these fields."

"Sure, sir, through the gates." It was Tremain who answered. His cottage was to one side of the

farmhouse; his wife, Alice, waited on old Mr. Strongman.

"The—gates?" Three gates, each leading, apparently, into a meadow, opened on Church Green. The rider turned his head uncertainly. "I—I am so pressed for time," he murmured, but as if speaking to himself rather than to the listening men. "And I have not been here for ten years, no wonder I have forgotten the way."

Tremain stepped forward. The lights in the huddle of cottages on the further side of the green were now shining from the upstairs windows—time to be home and abed, and he was going Killanogue way. "I'll put you across."

The grey house, once manor, now farm, lay among its outhouses in a sheltering dip. From Church Town only the tops of surrounding trees were visible, a shadow on the wide space of moonlit country. Tremain led the way across the green and past the cottages. He was wondering why the stranger was come so late to Killanogue. Old Master would be in his bed by now and might be upset, being so very old, if he were unexpectedly aroused.

As the pale horse found the road, the lights went out in Mrs. Old's cottage.

"'Tis a fine beast you are riding, sir," Tremain ventured, pushing back the first gate.

"It had need be." The latch caught with a dipping click and the stallion, pacing stately, went forward along the field path.

"Carries you grand."

"It is not often that I ride alone." A shadowy hand touched the arched neck. "Generally he carries a double burthen."

The first meadow was a narrow oblong, the path running whitely across the short end. Being curious as to the identity of the horseman, Tremain, walking on the short grass by the side of the path, tried one or two oblique remarks. "It is a long way to Killanogue by the road."

The horse quickened his stride as if moved by a feeling that time was passing and work had yet to be done. "Ay."

"Ten years since you were here, I think you said?"

"Yours is a healthy village—births, marriages, and men growing old . . ."

"Yes, last death we had was when Old Master lost his son—walked over cliff he did when he had the fever."

"And before that," said the rider, and his hollow voice had a dreamy note, as if he were recalling old scenes, old faces, "before that it was Ellen Morecamb of a decline."

How was it the stranger knew of Old Master's son and pretty Ellen? "There is a maid in the village the very spit of poor little Ellen—'tis Morwenna Biddick. Happen you know her, sir?"

"Not yet." They were crossing the second field. "My business to-night is with Mr. Strongman."

So Tremain had supposed. "Old chap is terrible

aged." He was a little anxious. What could the stranger want with his master? "It may hurry him up if you rouse him this time of night. Couldn't wait till the morning, I suppose?"

"My business does not brook delay."

Tremain was instantly apologetic. "He will sure be glad to see you, sir. He don't have many people calling on him, nowadays."

"Even so, he may not be glad to see me."

The third gate opened inward. Tremain stepped forward, pointing down the slope. The grey house among the elms slept with one eye open, an eye under an eve of thatch, a red watchful eye. "There be Killanogue, sir," said Tremain, his back for a moment to the man on the white stallion. "I can see the light in Old Master's bedroom. Hope he haven't been took ill."

His hand on the latch of the gate, he turned. The horse had not passed him, and yet—

The black and white of the moonlight was very clear, yet he could not descry horse or rider.

They were not behind—nor in front—nor in either of the two meadows. He stood dumbfounded.

For a long moment he searched the landscape, looking down on Killanogue, looking back to Church Town, almost invisible, the old tower topped the rise, and between him and it were the white ranks of named and dated stones—the stranger had been oddly familiar with those names.

A warm July night, yet the latch slipped from Tremain's fingers because they were shaking. He stood by the path hardly able to control his limbs.

No question but that the man with whom he had been in familiar talk had vanished.

Walking as if he had 'drink taken,' Alec Tremain went down the farm lane, went round to the back. What was happening at Killanogue?

It did not surprise him that as he reached the door, it should be opened to him by his wife.

"Why, Alec," she cried, "how did you know?"

"I don't know, but it was I showed stranger the way. I don't know what he wanted."

She ignored his remark as if he had spoken in a foreign tongue. "Alec," she cried, catching hold of his arm as if the feel of living muscle in some way comforted her, "Alec—Old Master's—gone."

He knew at once that this was what he had expected to hear. "Gone?"

"I took him his bowl of gruel as I always do day-end, and he seemed much as usual."

"Ah!"

"Then suddenly he sat up. 'Alice,' says he, 'they are calling me.' And his face changed so, you would not believe. 'Quick,' he cries, pointing to the press, 'give me my riding breeches.' But before I could so much as turn he had falled back on the pillow. Sure enough, old dear was gone."

And Tremain remembered that the white horse had needed to be strong as generally it had to carry a double burthen.

THE QUARREL

THE QUARREL

LIFE would be empty-like if we didn't have no squabbles, but I do think James Derrick went a bit far.

After all, Nicholas was his brother. What's more he had been born within half an hour of him.

That may have been the root of the trouble, for though they twinses were as different to look at as Esau and Jacob they must have been alike underneath.

Leastways they always wanted the same things.

Richard Derrick, their father, farmed Tresalyn, and seeing the boys was always at it hammer and tongs he set James up as a butcher and left Nick the farm. He'd meant, poor old chap, to bring peace, but he only sowed contention; for though James had a good business—you'll see his cart, lined with clean linen and hung with joints, going up around most days—he had wanted to be a farmer, and more particularly to farm Tresalyn.

Nor that wasn't all, for the twins went courting the same little maid, and Mary Bennett took her time figuring out whether she would rather live in the village and see everything that was going on, or be up to Tresalyn with handsome Nick. After dilly-dallying a bit—and I can't blame her, for after the char-a-banc took to coming through,

there was some life in the street—she married Nick, and from that day the brothers passed on the road without speaking.

Nicholas had got Tresalyn and he had got Mary, and there's no doubt James felt he'd been badly done by; but a grudge is a cold bedfellow and in time James couldn't but see that Mary's young sister Bessie was growed away to a fine woman. He hitched up with she and in time she brought him the finest family for miles around. The man was kept so busy providing for them that we all thought he'd have to forgive Nick his good fortune.

He were a dark stocky chap, the sort that thinks instead of talking. He wanted to show Mary she'd made a mistake. He fair lived for that, screwing here and pinching there, but you can't put by when you've six hungry boys looking to you and near as many maidens.

Children are a godsend to a farmer, but a butcher's business don't need a mighty lot of help, and James got a bit harassed, for it seemed as if he'd only to hang his trousers over the bedrail for there to be a new noise in the cradle.

I do truly think he'd have give up brooding over his wrongs if it hadn't a-been for John Bennett's will.

Nor if it hadn't been a mild winter Mrs. Bennett would never have took the crazy notion to wash her neck before 'twas over. Her husband warned her, but Sally was a wilful sort of woman. Natural consequence she caught cold and it turned to 'ammonia' and she died.

There wasn't no bier at St. Ryn those days, so she had a walking funeral and of course the two sons-in-law was invited.

The old man wasn't well enough to foot it, so they had to lead the procession. James was paired with Mary and Bessie with Nick, and when they got back James was put a-one-side of his father-in-law to carve the chickens, while Nicholas sat on the other and did his best with the ham. You'd have thought they might have spoke across, and I make no doubt Nick was willing but not James.

"I hope, father," says he to old John, "that you'll come and stay along of we. Got a quiver-ful but we'm doing well and there'll be a warm place for you."

"Thankee, m'son. I'll like fine to come, but first I'm going to abide for a two-three months with Mary up to Tresalyn."

There was nothing James could say to that for 'twas only right the old man should pay his first visit to Mary, she being the eldest.

"I'll be expectin' of yer then, in a month or two." He turned to his wife. "You mind that, Bessie. Your Da'll be coming to us in May."

Which was a good arrangement, only things never fall out as you'd expect.

Old John enjoyed hisself more that spring than he'd done in years—a first-rate time he had. To begin with there was the funeral. The Bennetts were highly respected and everybody went—all the neighbours. Then there was the sale and people came to that from miles round. Better than

Summercourt Fair it was, and they say it put more'n two hundred pounds in his pocket. After it was over the old man went up to Tresalyn, where there wasn't no noisy quiver-ful but only two meek-as-mice little maidens, and where Mary made him as comfortable as if he'd been her sweetheart instead of her father.

But John Bennett was pretty and old, too old to be enjoying life. Mary was some cook but she couldn't keep the breath in him, and before May he, too, was carried up the hill and put in under.

"They didn't look after old feller proper," James says. "Reason why—they didn't want him to come here."

Bessie knowed that was nonsense. "Anyway," she told him, "Da'll have left us the half of his money and you'll be able to buy the motor tilt-cart you've set your heart on."

When the Will come to be read, however, 'twas found John Bennett had forgotten he'd more than one daughter, for only Mary was mentioned. Old feller left her all he had.

James took it hard. He had had to let Nicholas have Mary and the farm, but he wouldn't stand for this. Who were the witnesses?

Ben Tippitt and 'Siah Jonas worked up to Tresalyn, and it appeared that the day before John Bennett died they'd been called in to witness his Will. 'Twas all fair and square.

Anyway James couldn't do nothing.

We knew Nick was fond of money but there's

nothing in that. We could all do with a bit more'n we've got.

"Looky here," said James to the men. "I s'pose you saw what was wrote on the paper . . . saw what you signed to?"

Ben Tippitt said he had, but 'Siah Jonas allowed that the candle wasn't extry bright and he was took up with thinking of the old man on the bed.

We did all feel James had been hardly done by. The man went home and thought it over. 'Twould have been easy to get the names wrote on blank paper with the true Will laid a-top. The candle light and the dying man and witnesses who hadn't much eddication—well, say what you will, it looked as if there had been some hanky-panky.

No doubt there'd been a good fire in the room, and Wills, after all, is only paper. Leastways that's what James thought, and after all he was Nick's brother and knew him better than anyone else.

Opposite butcher's, there's an old mill that belongs to Tresalyn and which Nick used as a store. Day after the Will was read he found he wanted a bag of seed and he came down to fetch it.

He kept bobbing up against people on the road and it struck him they were sort of grinning. They looked at him as if he'd left his clothes to home, and this puzzled him. Leastways it did until he reached the mill.

Pasted on the door was the bit of white paper that had been torn out of a child's exercise book.

It had printing on it, hand done, but good black on white, and it read :—

"I, Nicholas Derrick, wrote John Bennett's Will after he was dead so as to do James Derrick out of his share of the money."

Nor that wasn't all, for when he got back home he found that a notice with them daunting words had been stuck to the post of his yard gate. I tell you, the man was a bit hurried up.

James must have had a lot of time on his hands for wherever you went there was they notices. Everybody was reading of 'em and laughing, and though Nick tore down every one he see he couldn't away with them all. In the end he went up to the Vicarage and asked Mr. Adams what he could do to stop the nuisance.

Owing to the difference between him and James, the one of them went to chapel and 'tother to church, though they was both belonging to a church family. Parson knew that, and he couldn't abear to lose a good man like James with a family that wanted a lot of church help in the matter of christenings and buryings. You might say the quarrel was pounds out of parson's pocket.

Nicholas found him writing a sermon on "Brotherly Love!" and no doubt parson would have taken up the matter with James—for he liked having a finger in people's pies—if he hadn't had his own opinion about the Will.

"I'm loth to suggest that a man should go to law," said he, "but you ought to have the matter cleared up. These placards are a—a defamation of character."

That wasn't what Nick wanted. "Have the

law of him? 'Twould cost a mint of money. I had thought, sir, you might tell him how wrong he is acting."

Parson was a bit stiff. "This trouble wouldn't have arisen, Derrick, if you had been more careful in your choice of witnesses."

Nick explained that old man had been took bad all of a sudden and they had been in a hurry, and with that parson goes a bit red in the gills and says plump and plain that 'twasn't a fair will.

Nicholas Derrick was a smooth chap. I never knowed him get angry. "We had the charge of him, sir," said he, "and not a penny piece to show for it. Seem to me only right us should get what he left."

Very reasonable he was, but parson wasn't to be moved. "You can take it to a court of law or—you can live it down."

And Nicholas allowed that living it down would be the cheaper way. After all they placards didn't tell us nothing we didn't know before, and though James went on printing them and pasting of 'em on doors and walls, the best joke gets stale when you've heard it a two-three times.

One spring, when the black wind was blowing and everybody was having a turn of 'flue,' James got it bad, and doctor wasn't able to give his wife no encouragement. She was never one to waste time, and when Farmer Prin, who was lay-preacher up to Wesley, called in to hearten poor chap for his journey, he found Bessie in the kitchen ironing of his shroud and James lying alone overstairs.

"Derrick," said he after a solemn talk, "you can't repeat the Lord's prayer."

"Yes, can. I can do it backwards and forwards."

"You can't say 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us'."

James was took aback. "I dunno that I honestly can."

"Then how do yer expect to be let into heaven? You'd better forgive the chap."

James could see that if he were sent to hell on his brother's account, Nick would have got the better of him again, and though he were terrible set against forgiving of him, there was nothing else to be done. So Nicholas was fetched and all the village watched'n walk into the house—a thing he'd never done before in his life.

Mr. Prin said a few good words and the men shook hands.

"I've always felt kindly towards you," said Nick.

"Ay, you've had the best of it. I'm only sorry I shan't live to pay you back for all yer nastiness and mean ways."

"Come, come," cries Prin, "mus'n't say them things. Better fit you think 'pon yer dying."

But James wasn't to be hushed up. "If brothers can't speak the truth to one another, I should like to know who can?"

"Anyway," said Nick, "we be at peace now, and seeing you got to go and I be still hale and hearty, I can't bear yer no grudge."

That night James, ready though unwilling to depart, took a turn for the better. In a week he

was downstairs and Bessie was laying his shroud away with sprigs of lavender, and the neighbours was saying 'twas a miracle.

Now 'tis a fact that we forgive easiest when churchyard mould covers the other man. James saw he might outlive Nick. If he did 'twould be Nick would have to own he'd done wrong and ask forgiveness. 'Twas a grand encouraging thought that. Either James would get the better of Nick at long last or Nick would have to go down below.

As soon as he could hold a pen James wrote to his brother :—

“Don't take no notice of what we done o' Saturday. As I bain't going to die, us'll carry on as before.”

THE RICH MAN'S WIFE

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I

THE King and Queen were to be present at the ball and it had taken a lot of contriving to get an invitation—contriving, not on Lady Chapman's part, but on that of her daughter. Muriel had pulled ropes in vain until, at the last moment, Lord Sutcliffe had walked in with the longed-for card.

The event of the season, and yet mother had so little sense of what was fitting, that she had put on her old black satin. Muriel ran to the wardrobe and lifted out—reverently, for she loved clothes—an orange chiffon velvet.

"Darling, I am not going to have you look a frump to-night."

Lady Chapman glanced from the comfortable garment which had been cut high to hide a thin neck, to the piece of rich colour in her daughter's hands.

"Oh, my dear, why that French thing? It is so low and so short. Skimped the stuff they have."

"That's the fashion, mother. If you have what is being worn you don't look different from other people."

But Lady Chapman could not agree. In such a gown she would look different—very, very different

from the people she knew best. Orange was, she felt, an inappropriate colour for a woman of her age.

"The people will be saying, 'Look at that old sheep in lambs' wool.'"

Muriel, starry-eyed with excitement, rubbed her cheek against that—so soft, so thin—of her mother. "Lambs' wool is all the wear! No, ducks, you can't be allowed to make a fright of yourself—not this time."

It is a creaky matter for people of fixed habits to change their ways; and although Lady Chapman yielded, it was unwillingly.

"Sad work pretending to be what I am not."

Muriel, having got her way, could answer with a blithe heart. "Nobody cares who or what you are so long as you've plenty of money." She was fastening the orange gown for, although Lady Chapman gave way to her family on many points, she could not be induced to have a personal maid.

"Have a strange woman messing about me?" she said. "Not till I am coffin-ripe."

It was Muriel, therefore, who solved unexpected difficulties of hook and catch. As the orange gown met on Lady Chapman's bony shoulder, the girl turned from adjusting it to a safe that stood by the bed. She lifted out a tiara.

Her mother protested. "Oh no, dear; that thing makes my head ache. It is so heavy."

To her it was so much stone and metal. As other women had tiaras, Sir Jaspar had ordered a couple or so for his wife. They were furniture, even as

were the pictures by Old Masters, and the Chippendale chairs. Lady Chapman took no more interest in them than he had done. They 'smelt of money!'

She had locked them away in the safe.

Her thin wedding-ring and the old keeper, they were different.

"Now, mother, a little powder."

Lady Chapman disapproved of 'make-up.' The Lord God meant you to be a blossomy creature when you were young; but you should not grab hold of youth with No. 2 Blond Rouge and a cream face-powder. It did not deceive anyone.

"It is not to make you look young; it is to make you look pretty."

Grumbling, she submitted. So clever, these young people, such reasonable points of view. Of course they were in the wrong and you knew it; but you could not put it convincingly. Therefore you gave way and let them do as they would. Anyway it was nice to be told you were pretty. Ah, yes, once—

A little colour in thin cheeks, the sallow skin made creamy, brows and lashes emphasized! Lady Chapman, smiling, thought she would have liked to run down to the library and see if Jaspar were in. She remembered, however, that Jaspar had ceased to care how she looked. "Get the togs you want and I'll foot the bills. You got to look like the people you meet."

She did to-night.

But the women of her own class—those at least who were 'respectable,' did not make-up. Heavens,

what would the auntie who had looked after her as a child say if she could have seen her ?

"You don't belong to that class," Muriel had once said, "or at least, we don't."

That was the trouble—she did, and they didn't.

At the ball—and what did an elderly woman want at a ball ?—she sat on one chair till her bones ached. At first she found occupation in watching the royalties. How quickly the King talked, and of what a good stout satin the Queen's dress was made. "If she may wear quiet colours," thought Lady Chapman, "why mayn't I ?"

"Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat, where have you been ?
I've been to London to see the Queen."

She was the country cat, staring across at these people, wondering to find herself in the same room. "If auntie could only see me," she thought, "me that's been"—and she saw herself going from auntie's two-roomed cottage to her first place as general servant. It was at a farm near Plymouth, and before long she was putting by every penny to buy herself a good dress—one that would last—in which to be married. Jaspar, errand boy, grocer's assistant, buyer for the firm, owner of a shop, of many shops, had risen rapidly. So rapidly that when she came to think of it she felt breathless. Looking back at the workaday self of long ago she remembered hopes and plans. She had wanted the boys to be a help to their father in the shop, the girl to marry—as she herself had done—the young man who went round for orders.

The royalties left early. Muriel was dancing, and for a time the mother watched her, wondering how she and Jaspar had come to have such a smart and pretty daughter. From Muriel, the mother's thoughts turned to the son in New York, from whom she had that morning had a letter. It would not be long now before Harold was home. His boyish face rose before her, eyes that laughed at and yet loved her. Jaspar and the others were always trying to make her change her ways and ideas; but Harold liked her as she was. Such a comfort, that.

II

It dawned presently on her dreaming mind that Muriel had passed and repassed many times with the same partner; that she was now bringing him across the room. Lady Chapman had a sense of being unready. She knew how to speak to people like Lord Sutcliffe, but when the occasion arose she would forget, disgracing herself and the family. Once more she told herself anxiously that she must be careful not to say "Your Lordship."

Of course, as she opened her mouth, out it came.

"I hope your Lordship is enjoying yourself."

She looked up quickly. Had he noticed the slip? She did not think so, for there was that in the young man's face which told her he was pre-occupied with matters of greater moment. He murmured that this was far and away the jolliest ball of the season—the floor, the band, the—er—people, they were all top-hole.

The young couple had come to ask if she would like any supper, but she did not approve of eating late at night. Presently they drifted away, and Lady Chapman smiled—remembering.

She, too, she had had her gay times—the fair at Plympton to which Jaspar had taken her when they were courting. He had paid for her to ride on the round-e-go, and to see the fat woman in the booth. She could remember it all as if it had happened yesterday.

Yes, for they had made up their minds that night that they would be married as soon as they could afford the sticks for a couple of rooms.

When Muriel came to say she was ready to go, her mother was still thinking, dreamily, of the past.

III

As she stepped into the hall of her Park Lane home, Lady Chapman was told that Sir Jaspar would like to see her before she went to bed. The mother, kissing her child good-night, saw—could not help seeing—the light in her eyes. “What is it, dear?”

For a moment Muriel, usually self-contained, hid a flushed face against her mother. “Oh, Mums, I am so happy.”

“Is it ’is Lordship?” She was glad—very glad. He was a nice-looking fellow, and kind. He reminded her of a young postman she had known in the old days. She thought he would make her girl a good husband.

Muriel had drawn away, had seemed to shrink into herself, and Lady Chapman knew that she must have made another slip, perhaps dropped an aitch. Worriting things, aitches. She could never hear herself drop them; it was the other people who heard.

"Yes," said Muriel, but in a discouraged tone, "it is Bill Sutcliffe. He is coming to see dad to-morrow."

'Bill'—she would never be able to call him that. Oh, if only he *had* been a postman.

The woman who walked into the big library looked more than tired. Small, grey and, in spite of gown and jewels, insignificant, she was yet not more unnoticeable than the man waiting for her. Sir Jaspar was short and fat, one whose flesh hung on him loosely because the only exercise he took was mental. He glanced at her as she came up to his writing-table, and his look welcomed a trusted servant rather than a wife.

"I haven't nearly done, so don't wait up for me."

She decided that he looked tired. "If you don't take care, you will knock yourself up. A man can't work all night as well as all day."

"Now stow that. I can take care of myself, and anyway that wasn't what I wanted to tell you."

It reminded her that she also had 'a bit of news,' but that could wait.

He had taken a letter from a pile at his side, a letter with a red American stamp.

"Harold is doing well." Harold, their younger

son, had been trained in his father's office and sent to represent it in the States.

Lady Chapman's face warmed. "My little lad ! I knew he would."

"So I think of letting him stay where he is."

"Er—stay ?" She had stood as if awaiting an order ; now she sank into the chair at the side of the table. Her legs had bent under her.

"Yes ; I'm planning a big combine, and he will be able to handle it for me."

"He will live there ?"

"He will run over to see us now and again."

"For a holiday, like ?"

"That's it ; but he will make his home in New York."

She tried to think of the holidays, but her heart reiterated the fact that her boy was going to live—*live*—away from her. From a business point of view, very good for Harold. Soon he would be rich, as rich as his father. Her heart sank and sank. Sitting in the deep chair, the shaded light falling on her rich gown, she stared beyond the circle of light into the grey mist. These months of Harold's absence she had been living in the hope of his speedy return. She might be a selfish woman, but oh, how could she carry on, without her kind son, this drab business of living ?

Her husband was still speaking. "I must have a man there I can trust. If I make it worth Harold's while, yes, if it is to his interest—" His children were so many pieces in the game he was playing. John, the elder son, had become a barrister To

him were confided the legal interests of the firms and companies, and Sir Jaspar, in return for shrewd, conscientious service, put other work in his way. Though he expected his sons to put his interests first, they should not do it for love. Oh no; he would make it worth their while.

"They want me to take office," he said, leaning back, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. Perceiving she did not understand, he began to explain. "The Prime Minister has asked me to join him. There will be a vacancy. If I consent, I must have more time—"

He saw to his surprise that she was hardly listening. "Jaspar, I shall miss Harold."

He tried to be patient. "You won't mind after a bit, and it is time the lad cut loose from his mother's apron-strings."

Nothing she could say would make him change his mind. Her voice grew husky. "I—I have some news for you. Muriel—"

"What about her?"

"That young lord—the one who is so often here—he is sweet on her."

"Sutcliffe? You don't mean it? Good!" He rubbed his hands together and the tallowy face beamed.

"He spoke to-night."

"Ah!" He mused for a moment. "I like Sutcliffe. He has got guts—and I shall want another secretary. He'll do."

"Lord Sutcliffe—your secretary?"

Sir Jaspar was once more conscientiously patient.

A good husband, yes, he could plume himself on that. "The chap wants to go into politics and I can help him." He grinned at her cheerfully. "Can't get it, can you? Try to think of life as a game of skittles and me as a good player. One skittle is as good as another and they are all—skittles. I knock 'em over." After all she had her uses. She was the only audience before whom he might safely unbutton his mind. For the use to which he put her, he was willing to pay—handsomely.

"Yes," said Janet Chapman, with a dry mouth; "you get everything you want." Why was it that he did? Why, too, did she get nothing? Why? "I think I'll go to bed."

As she rose he seemed for the first time to see her as more than the automaton who had come to receive his orders. She became suddenly a possession. "Looking pretty bobbish to-night, aren't you? That dress was worth its money."

She remembered the powder, the touch of No. 2 Blond rouge. "You do not often notice what I have on."

"I see what is worth seeing, and I did always like a bit of colour." He caught at her hand, lifted it. "Look here, this isn't in the picture. Surely I've given you some decent rings?"

She lifted the third finger, let the light play on the thin plain ring, the old keeper. "You gave me these."

"Thank Heaven, I can afford to give you something better nowadays." Before she could realize his intention he had pulled off the keeper, tossed it

into the waste-basket. "That is only fit for a charwoman."

"Oh, Jaspar—"

"I'll have a tray of rings sent in to-morrow for you to choose from."

IV

Janet, walking over thick carpets, knew a discouragement, deeper than tears. Harold was going to live in America; Muriel—why, Muriel's children could be nothing to the countrified little granny. They would be ashamed of her. The Dowager Lady Sutcliffe for one grandmother, the woman who had been a general servant for the other. What a pity Jaspar had made all that money—

She crept into bed. Her face was turned to the wall, to the blackness and coldness of the wall. She felt that she was come to the end of a long road. Her husband, her children, they no longer needed her. They did not need her love and she had nothing else to give.

If only she had come to the end of life. But she was not old, not really an old woman, only in her late forties.

Lying deep in the softness of the bed, it was as if her heart lay smothered by the softness of her life, a feathery softness of which she could not rid herself, from which she could not escape.

She was tired, poor uneasy soul, and for all her unhappiness, she slept.

When she woke it was to a sense of discomfort,

which resolved itself into twinges, an ache of rheumatism. Light was stealing between the slats of the green blinds; the shapes of the furniture loomed black through the thinning dusk. Sir Jasper had come to bed after she had fallen asleep and she could see the dark blob of his head on the further pillow. She stretched cautiously and the rheumatism vanished. It had only been stiffness. She could not, however, go to sleep again, for Sir Jasper snored.

The grey brightened into day and Janet, weary of lying still, raised herself on her elbow. An early riser, it was one of the small discomforts of her life that she must stay abed until the morning was aired. Sitting up, she looked at Jasper, thoughtfully.

She did not mind the fact that he was snoring. It was a wife's duty to put up with that sort of thing. What she minded—

She stared at the unimpressive, blunt-featured face. Jasper got his own way and enjoyed life. The children, too. But she did not. Why was it? She did her duty, a duty which meant the performance of a number of small distasteful tasks. But—surely doing your duty should have brought some sort of reward?

It hadn't; no.

She seemed to be part of a machine. Could it be she was an unnecessary part? She kept house, but it was with the help of a trained housekeeper, who knew the routine of dinners, balls, suppers. She chaperoned Muriel, but when her girl married

that job would be finished. She entertained her husband's political and business friends; but she knew that almost anyone could have done it better. In the old days there had been real things for her capable hands to do, and she had been happy doing them. Perhaps, even now, if she weren't so stiff and set—

She could not change—you can't teach an old dog new tricks. She had done what she could, but she knew at last that neither good intentions, nor hard work, can 'turn a sow's ear into a silk purse.'

To her family, busily climbing the social ladder, enjoying the climb, she was a hindrance.

Pretty hard, that.

For a moment she lay back with closed eyes. A hindrance—when she only wanted to live in the way to which she was used. The tears ran down her cheeks. She had done what she could, and there it was.

Into the dark of her self-pity slipped a thought. If she were only a hindrance, why go on with the duties which were only tasks?

She lay contemplating the amazing idea.

Well—

She could drop out, let the machine roll on without the weary unnecessary bit which was Janet Chapman.

But—Jaspar would be angry.

It would not matter. She sat up with a sharp movement which quelled for a moment her husband's snores. It would not matter if Jaspar were angry,

for she would not be there to bear it. She almost laughed. Jaspar angry and only the servants—

Hardly conscious of the decision to which her movements were giving effect, she slipped out of bed, began to dress.

A black dress and close-fitting hat. By her table stood a light Norwegian box, that she liked for its crude bright colouring. She began to fill it—underclothes, photographs of the children, little mementoes.

“You will catch your death,” grumbled a voice from the bed, and she realized that the snores had ceased. She stood very still, her heart beating with fear as well as life.

“It is all right, Jaspar,” she murmured, and presently they recommenced.

V

Janet Chapman found she had the big house to herself. Not even the least of her many servants was about. As she opened the front door she was met by the kitchen cat, a handsome purry person with broad dark markings who had evidently been out on the loose. She had always wanted to make his acquaintance, but the maids had shoo-ed him away and she had not dared to remonstrate. Those servants—so much more—er—not capable, no,—but of a different type to her.

When she went down the steps the cat followed. He wanted to go with this lady, whose touch was kinder even than that of cook. Opening his pink

mouth he gave her to understand that if she would take him her country and people should be his.

But the Norwegian box was much too full for her to tuck him in. He accompanied her to the end of the area railings, running hopefully at her side and uttering his plaintive cry.

At Waterloo she caught an early train. With every revolution of the wheels, her spirits had risen, and the purchase of a third-class ticket was sheer joy. After the years of reserved compartments, what a pleasure to choose your seat, to sit among friendly strangers. An adventure—

How delightful, whatever your age, to play truant! At Launceston the train emptied and, refreshed by simple talk with folk as shrewd and simple as herself, she settled in a corner. She had left Park Lane behind. She was returning to the sort of life in which she could be happy. She did not think anyone would know where she was gone.

She had been married from her master's farm near Plymouth. Jaspar knew she was an orphan and came from further up country, but he had not been interested in her beginnings. If she had ever spoken to him of St. Ryn he would not be likely to remember.

Jaspar was only interested in what concerned himself and his career. She thought, bitterly, that she would be able to disappear—yes, as easily as a star falling out of the sky.

The train was nearing Stowe, the seaport behind

which lay her old home. She began to think out a tale.

On her finger was only the worn gold circlet. She took it off, held it meditatively. Through this had come the young lives, the early happiness. When Jaspar gave it to her he had talked of all the great things he would do. If only she could have guessed that those things were to come between him and her! She stood up, held the ring against her cheek for a moment, then dropped it into a river over which the train was passing. A tiny flirt of water, and the ring was sinking in the mud, burying itself.

From Stowe, it was five miles to her auntie's cottage, a long way for a woman unused to walking, and with a box to carry. If someone had come in to meet the train, she might be able to beg a lift. She went up to a man with a wagonette.

"I wonder if you could tell me—"

Through the distorting haze of years, she recognized him. This thickened bearded fellow must be Bennett May. When she left St. Ryn he had just started work in the smithy.

"Why, Ben—"

May, now the village carrier and jobmaster, stared. "If it bain't li'l Janey Rosevear!" he cried, and stretched a hard warm hand.

"Ben, I'm come unexpected!" Her London English slipped away. "How be I to get out to St. Ryn?"

"I be fetching a single gentleman. He'll surely leave 'ee set up alongside me."

VI

Neither the single gentleman nor Voylet, the sorrel mare, advancing any objection, Janet, perching herself beside Bennett May, drove round the quay and up through Stowe.

"Mrs. Old will be pretty and glad to see you," Ben said, thereby relieving her mind of a fear—not as to the welcome she would receive, but whether her auntie would be there to give it. "She had the 'ammonia' bad last winter, and hasn't been quite herself since. Wants someone to look after her, she do."

"Where's her husband, then?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"Auntie wasn't no scholar, Ben."

"Well, 'ee died. Let me see, must have been all of ten years ago."

"But—the children—" When she left home her auntie had had a boy and a girl.

"Died away young, they did. Yes, sure, old woman's been by herself now for a pretty many years."

"I did ought to have come home before," Janey said, feeling the pull of remembrance—the old tie.

Ben was a slow, serious man. "I won't say that people did not think you belonged to come. But then, you did not know how things was."

"I didn't. I was to service in London."

"Been that far, 'av 'ee?" Born and reared in

the little seaboard parish, he had never left it, hoped now that he never would.

He asked a few questions, and they helped Janet to invent a tale sufficiently simple for village minds to accept.

At the corner of Boggart's Lane, May drew rein. His fare was going to one of 'they new houses down to Bay,' and Janet must finish her journey afoot.

The return to homely unforgotten scenes had excited her, and she went as lightly up the twisty track as thirty years previously she had come down. Her heart was singing, 'Everything is the same—the same—the same,' and indeed even the new grocer's shop was only an old house which had had its front windows built out.

A gate broke the hedge, and across it she caught sight of her auntie's cottage, a tiny two-roomed house, set astonishingly in the middle of an eight-acre field. Someone was sitting in the porch. Her heart-beats quickened. The figure, bending over some needlework, was older and yet the same. She began to run.

"Oh, auntie, 'tis me, little Janey. I'm come home."

She was sobbing, was beside herself with joy. She hugged her auntie, and the old woman, surprised and pleased, gave her a country welcome. "Come back at last, 'av 'ee? Well, I be braäve and glad to see 'ee."

"You never thought I'd come?"

"Dunno for that. I jaloused you might walk in

one of these days." She got up stiffly. "Set ye down while I make you a coop of tay."

Janet put her hands on the bent shoulders and pushed her back on to her chair. "No, I'll do it." She wanted to find out for herself whether things were as she remembered—the tea in the old canister, the butter on the cool side of the linyhay. "Haven't come home to set with me hands in me lap."

Going to the furze rick she pulled out a gnarled stick, thrust it under the hanging kettle. The elder woman, watching her, hoped that Janey was come home for good.

"Why didn't you let me know you was coming?"

"Didn't make up me mind till the last minute." She was setting out the meal. Bread baked in a cloam oven, blackberry jelly, an egg laid that morning by fowls now stirring sleepily on a perch in the hen-roost. It was a long time since Janey had eaten with so much relish.

"What been doing all this time?"

"Loustering." The old word, a word she had not used for years, came to her tongue. To luster was to work, and that was what she had been doing—working in ways distasteful to her. Oh, dear St. Ryn, where she might utter the old words and nobody had any aitches.

"Someone told me that you was married."

"I did keep company once with a young chap, but he died suddint." She would not have it supposed she had been unsought. "Afterwards, well, there was a postman and others, but I was comfortable where I was."

"Where was you, then?"

"My people went to London and took me with them. They was nice people. She had three children and I was the nurse-girl. There was Miss Muriel and Master John and Master Harold."

"Then—" Mrs. Old's voice dragged a little for she was disappointed. "Then you'm only home for a holiday?"

"No, I've left. You see, the children, they've growed up, and Miss Muriel she's going to get married, and poor missis—" she was enjoying the tale she told "—she died last fall. That is why I'm in me blacks."

"Thought they was very smart. I suppose the family give'n you?" She ran her worn hand over the stuff. "Must have cost a tidy bit."

"Time like that people don't think of the money."

"They don't," said Mrs. Old, shrewdly, "when 'tis the missis that's gone. Saved a bit—you?"

Janet perceived it would be to her advantage to let it be supposed she had a pound or two in the Savings Bank. "Haven't done so bad, but I'm not one that wants to live independent—not so long as I've me health and strength. I'll be looking out for something to do."

Mrs. Old considered. "There's Mrs. Tom Tremain up to Vorgas. Her legs is bad and with harvest coming on and all they men to feed, she'll be fair put to it. She'd be 'nation glad of a little help, so she would."

Vorgas was the farmhouse at the other end of the meadow. If Janet went to work for Mrs. Tom

she could sleep home. Her return of an evening with sheaves of gossip would be something to which an old failing woman could look forward.

"Oh, I'd like that!" Janey cried, seeing herself once more earning the bread she ate, earning it by work that was worth while. "I'd like it fine!"

Not until they were in the little bedchamber under the unceiled roof, did Janey unpack the Norwegian box. Before she laid her down beside her auntie, between sheets that smelt of country soap, however, she must look at the photos of her children, set them out on a shelf. John, Muriel, Harold—some day, when it was safe to do so, she would write to Harold, tell him, under the seal of secrecy, what she had done. The dear lamb, he always understood. When he returned to England, for those holidays of which Jaspar had spoken, he would come and see her—as his old nurse. Yes, of course he would.

Smiling to herself she fell asleep.

VII

When the servants came down on the morning of Lady Chapman's disappearance, they found the front door open.

"Where is your mother?" asked Sir Jaspar of his daughter, at breakfast.

Muriel had been absorbed in a letter delivered by hand. Looking up in surprise, she noticed that the chair behind the Dutch coffee service was empty.

"I have not seen her this morning," she said, dreamily.

Not until Sir Jaspar looked about him as if in need of help did the butler permit himself to speak of the open door.

"Mother must have gone out," Muriel said, waking at last to the fact that something unusual *had* happened. It was not like Lady Chapman to have business of her own. "I—er—expect she will be in before long."

She made the bald suggestion in order to reassure herself. Her mother had always been at the beck and call of the family. It was as if a clock had stopped, the clock by which all their watches were set.

When midday came and Lady Chapman had not returned, they sent for John. It was difficult to know what to do. A person went out and did not return. The great area of streets engulfed her. Impossible to know where to look, where even to begin. A needle of a bundle of hay—yes.

When John came they went into the library. It was Muriel, candid and downright, who put Sir Jaspar's fears into words.

"Mother has run away."

John, a conventional, unemotional young man, was shocked. He was shocked at his sister. "You should not let yourself think such a thing, Muriel, much less say it."

But Sir Jaspar was leaning forward, attentive. "Why should she?" he asked, and John could only stare first at one, then at the other.

"She wasn't happy."

"Happy? She had everything she wanted." His face had reddened. He looked both angry and afraid.

"Oh no, dad. She wanted—" Difficult to put it into words, especially when there was something in your throat.

"She hated it here."

"She never said—"

"Oh yes, in her way; but we did not listen. We—we just made use of her." Understanding had come to Muriel through Billy Sutcliffe. She saw her mother's life as the grey waste it was. "Before he went away Harold told me not to bully her, but I—I wanted my own way." She was crying.

"Bully?" John said, wishing his sister would not use such queer expressions. So excessive.

She turned on him. "You don't understand, for you weren't fond of her. But the dad and I—"

He was greatly shocked. She should not allow herself to say such things. Not fond of his mother? A man was always that. "Muriel, really—" He turned to his father for support, but Sir Jaspar, standing at the window, was staring at the stream of buses going up and down Park Lane. What he saw was not the buses but his wife's face when he had pulled the old keeper from her finger.

"The question," he said, "is what we are going to do."

John, puzzled and hurt, was yet the efficient man of business. "She must be found," he said, "and

she can, of course—the best detectives—I'll see about that for you. We don't want it to get out. You don't, father, nor you, Muriel."

"No," the girl said. "Oh, what a selfish pig I am." She was thinking of the Sutcliffes and what they would say. Gracious, what did it matter, what did anything matter except that mother, dear silent mother, had played this strange prank on them, and slipped away out of the world? Suddenly she got up and ran from the room. She could not bear to be with John.

"I think," he was saying in his judicial way, "that we had better say mother has had a nervous breakdown—end of the season, you know—and that she is in a nursing home."

"We shall find her." But although Sir Jaspar spoke with his usual doggedness, his voice sounded flat. After John had left to set certain machinery in motion, he sat on in his swivel chair. He had had a blow and he must be quiet for a little. After thirty years of married life—Janet—

He was like a bullock that has been pithed.

VIII

What betrayed Janet to her family—or rather to the detectives whom John had set to work—was the Norwegian box. A porter's eye had been caught by the patch of bright colour, and his information led the enquirers to St. Ryn.

"Will you let me go down with you, dad?" Muriel asked wistfully, but Sir Jaspar had

refused. He was a man who had never taken a partner, and this matter of his wife was more his business than any other in his full busy life.

Now that Janet's whereabouts had been discovered, his fears had given place to anger. Pretty trick to have played him. He was the more indignant because he missed her.

The only person to whom he could talk ; who looked to see whether he were tired ; who cared.

" Passes under the name of Rosevear," the detectives had told him. He had not believed that she meant to disappear. Even then . . .

She was a wicked, selfish woman, so she was ; but he would bring her to her senses. As he journeyed west, his thoughts were wrathful. He prepared a bitter indictment.

He had been a good husband, and she had fine dutiful children, everything a woman could want. What right had she to go off and make him look a fool ? Run away, would she, a woman of her age ? She ought to be ashamed of herself.

IX

Mrs. Old, wondering who the visitor-gentleman might be, directed him to Vorgas. " Janet went to help Mrs. Tremain over the harvest and she is staying on. Go through the yard and you will come to the door."

When he had been the lad who went round for orders he had called at many a farm. He crossed the mucky yard with a queer feeling that he was

young again, that with the business on which he was come, a bit of 'courting' was mixed.

At Vorgas the door, which was ajar, opened into a big kitchen. The scent of fresh bread came to him as he rapped on the green panel, and he saw, ranged in light rows on the table, the cakes and loaves and splitters of a baking.

A strange woman answered his knock, but over her shoulder he caught a glimpse of Janet. She looked, as he saw with satisfaction, 'properly caught out.'

"What might you be wanting, sir?"

"Could I have a word with—" he would not say either "Miss" or "Rosevear." "Could I have a word with Janet?"

Mrs. Tremain stared at him curiously, a little unwilling. He heard his wife say in a low and frightened voice, "'Tis my master."

"Your maister where you was afore? Come in, sir. Janet have just about finished her work."

'Master' in the West Country means either husband or employer, and Mrs. Tremain, observant only of surface differences, took it for granted that Janet was using the word in the latter sense.

"I hope you haven't coom hoping to get she to go back with you, for I don't want to spare her."

"I do want her to go back with me," said Jaspar in tones which were entirely lacking in tenderness.

"Well, 'tis for her to say, but if she will stay with me, I be willing to pay her good money and 'tisen't a hard place."

Suddenly Janet spoke, and he perceived that

her face was flushed and her eyes bright. "I like hard work. I'm happy as I be."

She meant to defy him, did she? Yes, because she could shelter herself behind this other woman. He stepped into the wide, low-raftered place. Happy, too! She dared stand there and tell him that?

"Well," said Mrs. Tremain, "I'll leave 'ee to it, but Janey's best maid I've had for a pretty-many days, and I hope she bain't going leave me."

The door into the house shut behind her and, as if her presence had been an actual support, Janey sank suddenly into the cooper's chair at the end of the table.

Her husband laid hat and stick from him on the scrubbed board, and looked hard at her. "What do you mean by this?" he said. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, so you did. You, a respectable married woman, acting as silly as an unkissed maid. Do you think I've nothing to do but chase over the country after you? You go get your things on and come along back home with me."

Janey's right hand was clenched on her left. She spoke in a low voice, a low fainting voice: "I bain't coming."

"You are. I am not going out of here without you."

"Jaspar,"—she sank a little in her chair as if she were becoming part of it—"you can't make me come."

"Can't make you come?" He laughed at that, blusteringly. "You, that's my wife."

"That," she said, bringing back the fears he had pushed out of his mind, "that don't make no difference."

He fumbled blankly for the reproaches with which he had meant to overwhelm her. There was nothing to say. He stared at the Janet he had always known was there, under the surface. However, he could still appeal to that surface. "Janet! and you call yourself a good woman?"

She accepted that as true. No doubt she was doing something very wicked.

"Your children."

No good trying to explain.

"There's Muriel's marriage coming on and her mother must show up. The Sutcliffes would think it queer if she didn't."

Ah, yes, that was what they wanted her for.

"And I am standing for Cowchester. Electors—especially the women—like to see the candidate's wife. It is your duty to be there."

Janet nodded. "I know 'tis dreadful bad of me, Jaspar, but I am sick and tired of doing my duty. I won't do it no more. I can't, somehow. I would rather be kitchen-slut for the rest of my days than go on suiting myself to first one of you and then the other, and never be my own woman at all. Now you have got it. You did as you pleased, and the children did, but never me."

"Never you?" cried Sir Jaspar, trying to silence his shouting fears. "Why, I made you Lady Chapman, and gave you everything you wanted. You ungrateful hussy, haven't you diamonds and

servants and cars, and clothes from Paris—everything in the world ? ”

“ Ay, Jaspar—gilt on a cloam pitcher. ’Tisn’t seemly.”

His bluster dropped away. “ Tell me what you want. I don’t care what it is—you shall have it.”

“ I want,” said Janey, in that almost inaudible voice, which was so unyielding. “ I want to abide where I be, and for you all to go your own ways.”

X

Sir Jaspar stayed at the Cosmopole, because it was the largest hotel in Stowe and he was used to caravanseries. After dinner people danced in the ballroom and he looked on for a little, but they were mostly folks who had come to Stowe for a holiday, and who were absorbed in having a good time. Their happiness made him feel lonely.

He nursed his wrath for a night and a day and another night.

There was such a thing as law. Also there was public opinion. He was a good man, so he was. He had done his duty in that state of life to which it had pleased an all-wise Providence to call him !

Sir Jaspar ought to have been comfortable at the Cosmopole, but he hated the old buffers who asked him to play auction ; he hated his well-cooked, well-served meals ; and he particularly hated the wires and cables sent on from town.

What did his family, the election, the price of anything matter?

Janet might have known—

But that was it. Janet had known that her behaviour would upset him and she had not cared.

He felt ill-used, more than ill-used. In all England there could not have been a more forlorn creature.

XI

Sir Jaspar knew that Janet spent her nights with her auntie at Meadow Cottage. Day-end found him waiting by the yard-gate till his wife should come out of the farm.

He was annoyed to see that she looked bright and happy, as if she had come away laughing.

Wicked people have not any right to laugh.

When she caught sight of him her expression changed, but not to either fear or contrition. This was a hardened sinner. Bible words about perverse and evil generations crowded into Sir Jaspar's mind.

As she came up he put a hand to the bundle she carried, and she yielded it unwillingly. "Be careful with that, now, for 'tis a cake Mrs. Tremain has give me for my auntie."

As he lifted it away he saw something of more importance than cakes. "Where's your ring?"

"Gone after the keeper as you took off."

In spite of her words and deeds he had not believed she meant—really and with all her heart—to leave

him. A wave of immense desolation swept over him drowningly. The loss of his fortune would not have affected him so deeply, for a man who has made money can always turn to and make more. But this was the sun refusing to shine, not for a day but for the rest of his life. It—it could not be true.

"You have got it somewhere," he said.

"I threw it into the Camel. 'Tis in the mud there."

He walked beside her in silence, unable to speak. Janet, for all her bitter courage, a little anxious, noticed that his feet dragged.

Her last fears slipped away. She felt stilled, steady.

By the side of Meadow Cottage stood the usual courting-bench. "Set ye down for a minute," she said, able at last to be sorry for Jaspar. He looked tired, so he did. But—down here—what was there to make him tired? "Old woman's to St. Cadoc for the day, sewing."

Sir Jaspar sank limply on to the seat. "I didn't know as you meant it, Janet," said he.

XII

"Somehow I don't seem to get it right." His voice had a humble note. "Tell me why."

She turned on the seat, trying to find words. "If you don't know without my telling you, all I can say won't make no difference," she said after a pause. "But—well—'twere the last straw when you wouldn't let me have Harold home."

Sir Jaspar, taking some papers from his pocket, extracted a cable. "Like mother, like son," he said, and handed it to her.

"Returning, promised mother, prefer a home job.—HAROLD."

Watching, he saw her face change and his heart was not the less bitter. Harold was only—after all—her son.

How cold and dark it was beyond the door. Jaspar's human soul crept nearer to her.

"Janey, you are 'nation hard—"

She gave way in the end. Of course she did. Love was what she had been wanting, and this poor middle-aged man, fat, flabby, unused to pleading, had been her young lover.

Mrs. Old, returning from St. Cadoc, found them still sitting on the bench. When she heard the story—part of it—her sympathy was for Jaspar.

"I do think shaäme on 'ee, Janey, leaving a good 'ome and a good 'usband for some silly old whimsie. I'm glad you'm come to a better mind, so I be."

LIKE A DONKEY'S GALLOP

LIKE A DONKEY'S GALLOP

I

"HULLO there, hullo! Bain't no one to home?"

Nothing unusual in the yard gate standing open, but a little odd that, as he had dropped his uncle a postcard to let him know that he was coming over with the ram, no one should be about. A caked, dry stretch of earth between the farm buildings, with white and speckled hens scratching, but never sight nor sign of a man. If it had not been for the grey curl above the chimney, Tristram Old must have believed Farmer and his son were to market; but that smoke meant someone was inside the squat stone house.

It might, of course, be only the woman who "did" for the Hawkens.

Tristram had opened his lips to let out another roar when the inhospitable door above the step into the farmhouse opened and a good-looking smallish broad man showed light against the dark interior.

"Hullo, Ern, thought you all must be gone to Kingdom Come."

The sense of strangeness, of something different from his previous knowledge of Wynnard's Perch vanished at the grip of his cousin's hand. No doubt

that he was welcome, that Ern was as glad to see him as he was glad to come back to the place he still thought of as home—and that although he was five-and twenty and had a farm of his own. His mind, which had been a trifle jarred, settled back into quietude.

After the sandy farm on the edge of the sea, good to travel through lanes so deep that the hedgerows could meet overhead, good to come out on the wide cornlands, the wider moor. He would be staying overnight; would share Ern's bed as he had done through the years of his boyhood, and before he slept they would have a satisfying talk. His heart was hungry for talk, and Ern was his chum.

"How's the boss?" he asked, drawling the word in his deep slow voice. "How's the *boss*?"

For a moment it seemed as if Ernest, busy untackling the horse, had not heard. "Well," he grudged, "he'm teasy. Not so young as he were."

"Ah!" To them fifty was old. "Poor chap, too. Them rheumaticks do wrother a man."

"'Tis time he stayed home, but he want for to flip up his heels like a youngster. Come on in now. Supper is on the table and he won't like for we to stay gabbing."

The slight consciousness of a state of affairs different from what he had hitherto known, returned. It was unlike Farmer to care what his son and nephew did.

Andrew Hawken suspicious? And of Ern? Tristram gave himself a mental shake. They two

had always been the best of friends, good reason for why. Wasn't Ern the old man's only son? And wasn't he the best of good little workers? He, Tristram, must not go thinking things.

He did not want to, neither. The peace and security on which he rested his soul was part of the universe. Yet he felt anxious as does a man when foundations are threatened. He followed Ern across the yard into the house. A large light room the kitchen. His uncle, in striped shirt and knee breeches, his stockinged feet showing that as far as he was concerned work was over for the day, sat at the end of the table under a deep-set window.

"Well, Tris," he said, in a voice that to his nephew was reassuring, "glad to see you. Brought the ram, have 'ee? That's right. Set you down and try a bit of this pork—fat of it melts on your tooth."

Tristram's response was eager. The universe was still in good order and he had been a fool to fancy it out of gear. He sat back on the bench and smiled in broad content. In his nostrils was the smell of the peat, smouldering in the dark square of the fire spot. Satisfying, that homely familiar smell! Above the beam, fowling-pieces, polished by much handling, hung in a row, while to right glinted the bellows old man had made. At Wynnard's Perch things had their place, and when a chap was afar off he could see them on a night when he sat smoking his pipe before going up to bed.

"Heard you bought that ten acre above the Goffin?" He was hungry after his fifteen mile

drive; hungry, too, for news. What had they two been doing during the month he had been absent? That ten acre, it would round out the farm but, though old man was full of money, it must have been a bargain to have tempted he. Tristram was sure that a tale hung to the buying.

"Eh?" said Farmer. His hearing had never been acute and Tristram had spoken through a full mouth.

"Speak up, you," Ern warned, a hard note in his voice. "He is hard of hearing."

To Tristram's surprise his uncle resented the faithful comment. Although his face was too warmly coloured to deepen in tint, his eyes showed angry. "No, I bain't neither," he said to his nephew, "but if you must talk before you've swallied your meat, the Dear himself wouldn't be able to hear tell what you was saying."

He had spoken directly to Tristram, ignoring his son, and the atmosphere—peat-smoke and established goodwill—was torn and blowing about. Tristram saw dimly and was loth to see. He bestirred himself, made clumsy attempts to draw both into the talk.

"Last time I was here, you had a different woman doing for you," he said, when the provider of supper had washed up and returned to her home in the village. He had noticed that if he did not talk, silence dropped on the others. He felt he must keep up a show, say something at intervals, but his heart wept. He longed to slip out, tackle up his horse, and ride into the dark. Better the loneliness

of his farm than this hostility where had been the deep peace of proven affection.

"Humph," said Farmer, his tone expressing what he had not the words to say.

Ernest, from the other side of the hearth, grinned at his cousin. "You have hit the right nail on the head at last."

His fumbling fingers had found the door and it was not locked. "Aw—how's that?" In his relief at not being shut out he became almost cheerful.

"When you was here back along, we had Mrs. Tippet ; but she is laid up with a bad arm. Then we got Janey Osborn to come in." He paused, turned a flinty face towards his father. "It turned out that her mother wasn't agreeable for her to stay."

Hawken leaned out of his chair, for the first time that evening addressing his son. "Your fault," he said fiercely. "You would go kissing of her, and of course her mother wouldn't let her bide."

Ernest, a slighter man than the others, quicker too, laughed. "I ask you, Tristram, what is a maiden for but to be kissed?"

"She was a vartuous girl," said Farmer, "and she didn't like it."

"You mean her mother didn't."

"You weren't kissing she."

"Anyway," said Ernest, "I be willing to marry Janey."

"For the matter of that, so be I."

Tristram, slow at the uptake, sat back suddenly

happy. Was that what was the matter? Was that all there was to it? A maid? Well, well.

"Can't mean to say you do both want to marry this Janey Osborn?"

Hawken stared at his son. "What have you got to marry on?" And Ernest countered with, "Better fit you take a woman of your own age."

So fiercely did they look at each other that Tristram thought of fighting cocks. Ridik'lous 'twere. Still a mighty disagreeable sort of joke. "Surely," he drawled, "'tis for the maid to say which of 'ee she'll take?"

Farmer—no denying it—was a fine man, six foot and broad. Plenty of life in the old chap; and though he was a bit masterful, Tristram knew from experience that he was pretty easy in the house. Been a good man to his first. A maid might do worse . . .

Ern? Well—

Too popular with the women. There were tales—and what about Mrs. Bennett's last baby? Bennett took it for granted, still—

More'n one barrel of pork had gone to their cottage from the farm. He had seen Ern trundle it into the little yard at the back.

Perhaps that did not matter to a girl. He did not know. Had not had much truck with them himself. Anyway Ern was young and there was a deal in that.

Surely to goodness when it came to kissing, a maid would rather have the young man than the old? And it was for her to say.

It was a month since Andrew Hawken and his son had spoken to each other, and during the silence Farmer had turned this matter of Janey Osborn over in a just mind. "I allow 'twill be better to settle it between ourselves."

Leave the woman out of it, give her no choice ? "You wouldn't never agree," Tristram said.

"'Tain't likely we should, still I think we might come to a sort of settlement." The out-door man was suddenly grown self-conscious. "When two people can't agree—" he took a penny from his pocket, laid it on the table—"they toss for it."

II

Ernest, staring at the penny, let the idea of tossing it and abiding by the result, simmer in his mind. More to it than the tossing. Farmer would have a scheme.

Hitherto Ernest had held the trumps—some of them. Unfortunate that he had nothing to offer a maid. A farm, or even the distant promise of one, and he could have gone ahead. As things were he was no better than a hind, and Janey—

Impossible to tell what the maid was thinking. A very warm man, his father ; and Janey kept you guessing. About this tossing now ?

The person who took it amiss was the one for whom it had no significance. That the future of any woman should hang on the turn of a coin affronted Tristram. "If Janey Osborn be agreeable

to have you," he said to Farmer. "Or you—" turning to Ernest.

"Don't 'ee see, Tris, if only one ask her, she can't have t'other."

"But 'tis the maid have the say."

Farmer shook his head. "Silly idee, that."

Tristram tried again. "Seem to me fulish for both on 'ee to be wanting the same maid when there's so many extry women. 'Twould be more sensible-like if you was both to choose another and let this un go."

The firmness of their refusal surprised him. Their voices had the drawl of summer tides, quiet but relentless. "No, 'tis Janey Osborn for me."

This Janey, Tristram thought, must be some handsome. Though he had lived for so long at Rosewithiel he could not call home any face that would be likely to set men at odds—like beasts fighting for a mate. Osborn? There was a road-mender of that name, but he was old and a widower.

Andrew Hawken took up the coin. "Be you willing, Ernest?"

"Depends," said his son. "Heads you win and tails—what about tails?"

"Tails I find the money for the ingoings of a five-hundred-acre farm and set you up—you and she—there!"

"And heads?"

"Heads I find the money for 'ee to go out to South Afriky, mining." It was a reasonable offer, fair to both and he looked for approval. "Well, what say? Is it a bargain?"

Ernest might go a-courting but had no money ; Farmer would have no chance against young blood. The scheme was sound and only Tristram demurred. " Bargain for you men," he said, " but 'tedn't fair on the maid."

" Now, now," Hawken said, and both men looked to Ernest for the final word.

" I'd as soon we tossed."

III

The men went over to the table by the window and Farmer put the battered penny in his nephew's hand. " If you do the tossing, can't be said after that there was any hanky-panky. Now, then, heads I win, tails 'tis Ernest."

Tristram, a docile son of the farm, took the coin, took it reluctantly. Old it was, had no doubt been used in many a queer bit of business. " Be you both agreed ? "

They bent forward in unconcealed eagerness, their hungry glance on his hand. The best way out—this, and they were willing.

Tristram sent the penny spinning through the shadowy air, clapped a hand down as it fell on the table. Janey Osborn's fate and he to decide her future !

Suddenly he swept the coin off the board. " Sorry," he said, " but I can't do it." He looked at them anxiously. " No ill-feeling but, if you must toss for the maid, do it yourselves," and turning he went out into the evening.

IV

Groups of cottages were set along a looping road, deep in green gardens, and covered with the darker green of ivy. Above them elm-trees towered, seeking the light, and a moon was red in the south. Tristram, strolling along, could not but wonder in which of the little homes the trouble-maker was to be found.

Labouring folks go early to bed and already a glimmer of candle-light showed behind the muslin of upper windows. Was Janey Osborn slipping out of her day-clothes in one of those bare clean chambers? From nowhere came a vision of loose hair falling over a naked shoulder. A maid in the walled security of her bedroom. Safe from men's eyes, she would be, but not—not from their thoughts . . .

Tristram's mind turned to Ernest. Always in hot water, that one; but what did it matter? Kept him alive, it did. Now he, himself—and he laughed. A soft fool to be envying Ern his courtings.

He had a fine farm and money in his pocket, and his herd of red-brown bullocks was doing fine, so it was. What more did he want?

Certainly nothing that was to be got by mooning along the lanes, disturbing the couples. Better fit he shut out his silly thoughts and went home to bed.

Crossing the yard he stumbled over a black pig which had lain down in the shadow of the horse trough. Indoors and out, the quiet of early night

—the breath of sleeping things! His uncle had gone to his room, but Ernest, a glum Ernest, was waiting up for him.

Tristram followed his cousin up the crazy stairs. “Well, did you carry on?”

The answer was a resentful, “He won the toss.”

Tristram’s sympathy was doubled by the sense of his own loss. “You’re going then? Oh, Ern!”

Wynnard’s Perch without Ern . . .

“I shift out of this to-morrow. Old man gave me the money before he went overstairs. He don’t want to see me again.”

Incredible ’twas. “And you such good friends.”

“When a bit of a girl come between, nothing don’t matter.” A surly voice, Ern’s. Taking it hard he was, and little wonder for that. Loved his home, poor chap did, and the place and all. In foreign parts he would be like a lost soul.

“Can’t believe it.” Never felt like that, Tristram hadn’t, never would.

“Aw, you wait.”

Well, well, it was of no importance, not like the hard fact of his cousin’s loss. “Ern, I can’t take it in as you’re going.”

He looked so unhappy that Ern, justifiably angry, was drawn. “Got to take it in. What’s more—’tis you sent me.”

“Me—you don’t say—why me?” The surprise was a blow. Tristram had been sitting on the edge of the bed unlacing his good boots in a desolate quietude. The accusation brought him to his feet.

“What do’ ee mane?”

The white moonlight revealed Ernest's face as hostile. "If you had carried on I wouldn't have had to go."

"Eh? Eh? Would not have had to go, and why not?"

"When the penny come down under your hand I felt certain sure 'twas tails."

Tristram sank back, his mouth open. Tails? Why yes, sure. He had not thought of that. It might have been tails. If it had a-been . . .

Why then Ern could have married the maid and Farmer would have kept his word and found the money for a farm.

Ern was blaming it on to him, Tristram, that things had falled out different. Some truth in it, too.

The first toss should have decided the issue—no doubt about that.

What had possessed him when his hand was clapped down not to lift it and look?

Ern going overseas when he did not want to stir a stump. When he wanted to sit tight, tealing the land and living by it!

Tristram let out a groan. His fault—so it was. And—the matter was settled.

He crept into bed, lay with face turned to the wall; presently Ernest joined him but neither slept. The moon slipping along the sky faded from the room and they lay in the dark.

A slow man, Tristram Old. His midnight mind twisted on itself until at length—

"Ern, that toss didn't ought to count."

"Didn't ought to, perhaps ; but old man means turning of me out."

"It didn't ought to count about the maid. If you must goo why not take she along ? "

Ern stirred under the clothes and Tristram knew that he was, in part, forgiven. "I believe Janey do like me a little . . . "

She would, of course. "Better fit, then, you take her."

"Afriky ? No, she wouldn't go that far."

Tristram was eager to be of use. "For all that, she needn't marry uncle. When you've dug up a bit of money, you'll be coming back ? "

"I do mean to have a farm of my own hereabouts, whatever old man say to it."

"No doubt she'd rather wait for you than marry he."

"You thick-head ; how's maid to know I'm serious ? I'm going out of this to-morrow, and I've give me word that I won't say nothing to her."

Funny to think that Ern who had courted such a-many maidens was serious. If he said nothing she would take it for granted he had not been. Naturally.

When it was a question of marriage words meant more than kisses, so they did.

Well, but he, Tristram, was not bound. "As I didn't finish the toss I belong to help 'ee, Ern."

"Don't see what you can do."

"I can tell she—" he elaborated a plan.

Ern was doubtful. "Man belong to do his own courting."

"Don't want to barge in. Never had much to say to the maidens and 'twouldn't come easy."

"Well, now, Tris, I dunno. No denying that I would like for her to know I'll be coming back soon as I can." His voice changed and Tristram, hearing, was moved to belief and sympathy. "I do love her, and that's the truth of it."

"You've loved a-many, Ern."

"Have, but this is different."

They lay in silence for a space. Ern, the flutter-by, was caught at last and a good thing too. This was the love that led to marriage, and Tristram had a solid man's respect for the mysterious partnership of man and wife. He swore to himself that he would do his best for Ern and his woman. His best—so help him God!

V

"Do I know the maid?"

"Did ought to. Have 'ee forgot the pisky in the apple-tree when you was over for harvest a two-three years back?"

"*That* maid? You don't say!"

A door, opening in his mind, led him through into a scene so vividly remembered—it was like a highly-coloured picture. That pointed face, the slant-set eyes which had looked down on him from the screen of leaves. A child's face—well, but it was all of three years ago—"I should like," he said slowly, "to see her again."

"'Tis like that with all on us," rejoined his cousin.

"Aw, don't worry, I don't feel like that for no maid on earth." He hesitated, hit on the truth—"and more's the pity! But—well, I do owe her something, the hussy."

"Meaning—?"

Tristram grunted. "Look here, Ern, I'll see her and tell her Farmer wasn't agreeable for you to ask her till you was in a persition to marry."

"Not a word about the toss."

"Nary word, Ern."

"Right you are. Well, then—'tis she is always first for a turn of water, mornings."

VI

Rosewithiel village consisted of a few cottages built in a hollow about a flow of water. On the downs, springs are few and far between. Rosewithiel, however, not only had water bursting out of a face of rock, but a brook at which cattle—and the saying is, 'thirsty as a bullock'—could slake their thirst.

The freshness of dawn was to Tristram an everyday experience, but on this morning in late summer as he walked briskly towards the Fallon Pool, he felt unusually light of heart.

He was going on Ernest's business and he was glad to go. To do so eased his soul of guilt. It made up, so it did. Besides—

The Osborns' cottage was at the end of the village. It stood half-way down a strip of earth, on to the

brown clods of which trees shook their fruit. Great old pear and apple trees, they had been rising into the blue for more years than those of his life. It was the one by the gate into which Janey—old Osborn's grandchild, had climbed. After filling her apron she had chanced to look out of her bower of green and the sight of clear air had frightened her. She could not dare the descent. Indeed, if she had no help she must fall and break all her young bones—and, at that moment, Tristram, on his way home from the corn-cutting, had passed. On seeing the broad shoulders she had lifted up her voice and wept. Tristram had looked around and at last he had looked up—to catch sight of bright goldy hair amid the shining leaves.

“What will you give me if I lift 'ee down?”

Not a chivalrous question, but where Janey was concerned men forgot to be generous. “Shan't give you nothing.”

Although the gate was open in his hand he let the latch fall back into its socket. “Then get down as best you can.”

She was for letting him go, but the sight of that inexorable back sapped her courage and she called to him again. “I shall drop if I bide here a moment longer,” she sobbed, and he swung himself into the tree.

Not easy—she being little and he a fine-grown young man—not easy to reach her; but presently she was clinging to him, was being carefully lowered, had her foot on garden earth. Then—the little minx—she had fled, quick as a leveret.

But he was not going to be 'fried in the fat' that fashion. He came rushing after up the path, only to find when he reached the door of the cottage that she was standing on the safe side of her mother.

"This is the kind man, mum," she was saying, "who helped me down from the tree. Please thank him." Was it possible that behind that mother's broad back a finger was going up—up to that tilted nose, that there were other spreading fingers behind it? Shame on the naughty hussy. No denying though that he should have paid himself when he had the opportunity.

"Always in mischief, she be." Mrs. Osborn, pleasant, stout woman, was smiling at him. "You must kindly excuse her." She turned to her daughter. "What did 'ee go after they apples for? Leave 'em bide and they will fall o' themselves."

This, then, was the maid, now three years older, over whom his uncle and cousin had quarrelled. He glanced at the cottage, thought to detect a waft of smoke rising from the chimney. She was up then, and before long would be coming for a 'turn' of water.

Opposite the cottage the road forked, one prong sloping to an opening between thick-foliaged elms. Through this green arch went the village women to fill their red cloam pitchers at the Flow.

The way—having been worn by generations of water-seekers—was cut so deeply that the snaky

roots of the elms stood uncovered on either side. Beyond the trees was open country, grown with brambles and the spiky shrubs of the sloe. The spring bubbled from a flat face of rock and fell into a stony basin—the Fallon Pool. Overflowing this—when village needs permitted—it spread abroad, filling the heavy land with clay pits and quags until it joined the brook.

Tristram—who had his plan—knew the place too well not to walk with circumspection, for he did not want to be mired. He meant to see Janey before she caught sight of him. To do so he must hide, a thing easy enough to compass.

From a tree which was being sawn into logs he took a sizeable piece of wood, dumped it behind a conglomeration of fern and bramble, and sat himself down.

The place was very wet, dewy as well as damp, and every leaf was diamond bright. A musky smell which he had always associated with snakes came from the bush, but he could not see any adders ; indeed the Fallon Field was as still as if it had not been full of peeping interested life.

A faint ripple of song slid into the quiet, breaking, as it seemed to Tristram Old, against his breast ; notes that were warm and fresh and—and something more. He tried to call home the words of the queer exciting tune.

The singing-bird turned in to the path between the trees—a maid in a blue gown and carrying two red earthenware pitchers. She was giving voice to the old Blessing Song :—

“ Here stands a good old apple tree ;
 Stand well root,
 Bear well top,
 Every little twig
 Bear apple big ;
 Hatfuls and capfuls,
 Hollo, boys, ho ! ”

With Farmer, hinds, and womenfolk, many a time had Tristram chanted that song in the orchards to make the trees bear a heavy crop. He saw again the new moon shining between the branches, heard the wild noise of the horns, the licence of that mad dancing round the trees.

He remembered, and with returning memory came old emotion. His blood—slow-moving through sober veins—hurried, broke into a dance, the dance of youth and spring.

The chequer light fell between the trees on to the blue gown, the glinty hair, the queerly-set green eyes. Tristram's heart thudded. 'Twas the maid of the apple-tree. The same, yet with a difference. Older she was and—

What was the difference ? He could hardly see for that quick distracting beat and the odd longing that he had.

In spite of the big pitcher she carried in either hand, Janey ran, as of old. He was thrilling with that memory of her bird-like flight across the garden. This, however, was not flight, but the dancing gait of a creature too young, too glad of its life, to walk. Flashing out from the shadow of the big elms, she set a pitcher under the Flow and stood back.

She had ceased to sing. Her glance was on the bubbling spray of the water, and the human note had given place to its immemorial voice, a voice which, in the sudden hush, Tristram heard for the first time.

All the few years of his and Janey's life the Flow had talked to itself in the wilderness of the Fallon Field. It talked whether they came or stayed away. It talked without reference to them, ignoring them, unaware of them.

They might do as they would. He had the feeling that he was—in spite of his green surroundings—alone with Janey in some great sunlit space.

They two.

Rising with the lightness of a countryman in the open, he stepped over the lush wet grass. Something—the ancestral thrill of wild wooings and matings—had moved his mind, and he was the primitive man stealing on the unsuspecting woman.

Janey was stooping over the stony basin, replacing a brimming with an empty pitcher. The shining hairs on the back of her neck had coiled into little goldy curls above the bit of linen which served her as a collar. Suddenly a hand grasped her waist and lips were pressed on the curls—on the warm flesh.

The pitcher slipped sideways into the pool as she flung her hand out backwards, catching her assailant across the face. The sharp unexpectedness of the blow gained her her freedom, and in a moment she was on the other side of the Fallon

Pool. She turned, stared. The tall, dark man, one of whose cheeks glowed red, was a stranger. To Janey, sudden kisses were a commonplace and a slap the proper payment for them; but kisses from a stranger!

From her refuge on the other side of the Rock Water, she told him, stammeringly, that he was an impudent fellow, so he was. Her heart swelled and her eyes filled with tears. How had he dared—and what a fine man he was—and why did she feel so anyhow and all over?

"You belonged to give me a kiss," cried Tristram, eager and unashamed.

Above the din that something—though what she did not know—was making, she heard him. She could not believe her ears. Blinking away those ridiculous tears, she searched his face. It was evident the man meant what he had said. "I belonged to?"

"You do owe me one."

"I—?"

"Owed it me, you have, this three years."

Her fair, slightly freckled cheeks grew red. Why—this was the chap who had saved her the day she nearly fell out of the apple-tree—the chap she had cheated. Aw, when it came to kissing all was fair!

He would be Tristram Old, Farmer Hawken's nephew. She had thought him fine and big, but she had not known he had such eyes. Blue as ring-stones they were, and clear and—oh, it was difficult to look at him.

"You'm a vengeous fellow," she murmured. "Now, me, I'd forgot all about it."

Tristram took the brimming pitchers. He would carry them for her.

What a wonderful day it was. He was not walking on common earth as he strolled beside her up the lane.

For a wonder he found he had a lot to say. He had to tell her of his farm on the headland where the winds were so wild they blew the turnips out of the sandy soil and the poor beasts down cliff. Then his prospects—a good farm but he had had to borrow for the ingoings. He was paying the debt off. Another year and he would be his own man. He would like her to see the place. Did she ever come to St. Ryn?

She took the pitchers from him at her grandfather's gate. He begged the usual payment but she pushed the gate to. "Bad man of business, you," she told him, and below the dancing eyes her lips were steady. "Why don't 'ee make your bargain before you do the work?"

"And be left with a debt to collect as best I can? Well, if you don't mind—"

"I don't owe you nothing," she assured him hastily. "As 'tis you've took more'n I've ever given a chap."

For a moment Tristram looked through outward seemings into truth. Then he remembered his uncle's comment, "He would go kissing of her," and Ern's complacent, "I do believe she like me a little."

"Gived?" he said brutally. "But I suppose they took—" and he remembered that he was not come to daff with Janey but to tell her of Ern's predicament.

Ern wanted her. Ern, who had had her kisses. Ar-r-h and Ern might have her for all he, Tristram, cared. Though—

No, then, his duty was plain and he did not care—not the brass button off Old Cow's horn! She belonged to Ern.

And he, Tristram, was not thinking to marry, not ever. A lonely life for him, no wife, no happiness.

"I came down to tell 'ee," he said glumly, "that my cousin, Ern Hawken, be going to South Afriky so as he can earn enough to get a farm hereabouts and come back to you. Farmer do want 'ee, too, but you needn't have he for though his pockets is lined, he'm old."

Janey had set the pitchers down on the garden path. She stood between them, looking down. She did not seem to be taken aback by his news. Tristram, staring at her, wondered.

What was she thinking? What answer would she give him to carry home?

At last, slowly, she lifted the fringes of those green eyes. "Am I to take it that you'm advising of me?"

Although his mind was swaying like tree-tops in a wind, he had his voice under control. "I have come along here to tell 'ee that—" He swallowed hard. "Ern asked me to tell 'ee—" He was

determined to get it out, "to tell 'ee that he want to marry you."

She smiled to herself and the corners of the full lips curving revealed a dimple to right of them. "Then I s'pose," she said, stooping for the pitchers, "I s'pose the kiss you give me just now was from Ern?"

VII

The next few weeks passed for Tristram like a month of Sundays. Short, black, dragging days with the autumn rain pocking the sandy soil and everywhere the smell of rotting vegetation. A good mushroom year, and scarlet fungi pushing up through the wild grass on the commons.

Tristram tried to think of his cousin a-board ship, but his thoughts were more often at Rosewithiel. Was Janey thinking long of Ern? Or—

Surely no maid in her senses would take Farmer? Men of his age had little difficulty in finding a wife, some sort of a wife. If you came late to market you took what you could get.

No, certain sure, it would be Ern.

Knew how to put the 'come hither' on the maidens, that one did. Tristram wondered how long it would take him to fill his pockets. After all, to make enough for the ingoings of a farm took some doing. It might be years before he came home.

Then again, he might have a stroke of luck, find diamonds or a gold mine or something.

Tristram's housekeeper, Mrs. Campion, lived in a cottage that nestled to the side of the farmhouse like a bride in a man's arms. Evenings she went home to her husband, leaving the farmer to a solitude of pipe and fire. A low raftered room, the kitchen, a room of shadowy corners. It contained all a man needed for his comfort—or nearly all. Tristram sat in the big chair, gazing dreamily across the hearth. On the other side stood a low chair—Mrs. Campion's, of course.

When she had a moment to spare she would drop into it and go on with the knitting of her husband's stockings. She was a legacy from the last tenant of Vose and a good hushed worker.

He was glad she primmed her lips and let little pass, for he had his thoughts to keep him company.

Hitherto they had sufficed.

When he came in from the farm he ate, then settled down for a read—the weekly paper, a catalogue, a circular, sometimes he even read a book. Lately, however, he had read little.

The paper lay folded on the table, the flames died off the coal, but he did not notice. He sat with his dreamy gaze on the chair opposite his own—

A month after his cousin sailed Tristram was ploughing for winter wheat when he descried Postman coming over the commons. Not often that one came to Vose, but maybe Ern had written. Tristram left his three brown horses at the end of a furrow and went to meet the man.

After all only a postcard, a postcard in his uncle's awkward writing. Old man was no scholard, and a

penny bottle of ink lasted him ten years and was then thrown out because it had gone dry. What was he writing about? Tristram's blood turned to water—for Andrew Hawken was asking his nephew to come over for his wedding. It would take place in a fortnight's time.

Tristram went slowly back to his team. Doggedly he drove up and down, up and down, till he had ruled the open field with straight brown lines. Whatever a man's feelings, work had to be done.

Mrs. Champion had a savoury fry ready for the tired man, but Tristram was not hungry. The smell of cooking meat, of little onions spluttering in the fat, failed to make his mouth water.

"Caught a cold, you?"

"Don't you worry now, I'm all right. I'll have something before I go to bed."

The old woman was concerned. This last week or two he had been looking whisht, so he had. "I'll put a hot brick in your bed."

Easy within doors, Tristram showed surprising irritation. "You do, and I'll heave the brick through the window, and you after it."

Mrs. Champion shook her head. She had never known a man contrairy so long as he was well. What would it be with Young Boss? Belly-ache or a chill on the innards? She cleared the kitchen table before going home, got out a bottle of salts and stood it—a conspicuous object—on the bare wood.

No use argifying with a man, but put the remedy

under his eyes and maybe he would have the common-sense to swallow it.

Tristram heard the door shut. Old woman was gone, and he had the place to himself. He had been filling his pipe, but he laid it on the mantel-shelf unlighted.

Not even with tobacco could he comfort his soul. He dropped into his chair, but so low was he, he did not even ease his feet.

The postcard had lain in his breast pocket all day and he had been conscious of it as a man is conscious of a mustard leaf on his skin. He took it, studied afresh the few words.

Old chap had been in some hurry. Talk of the grass growing quick in spring, but this autumn grass had it beat. Farmer's courting must have been short and sweet, like a donkey's gallop. Tough old cock.

And he was to marry Janey—

Tristram knew at last what was the matter with him. He was disgusted. 'Twadn't fitty that a young maid should marry an old man. Janey did ought to have known better. Had she no natural feelings? It was not as if he had not told her about Ern.

She had taken Farmer because he was well-to-do. Shame on her. A woman did ought to marry a man because she loved 'n and he was the light of her eyes. Tristram knew just how she ought to feel about it.

Go to her wedding? Not he.

He couldn't do it. Nor he wouldn't.

She was not worth thinking about . . . and he sat thinking and thinking until the night lightened in the eastern sky.

VIII

During the fortnight before Andrew Hawken's wedding, Mrs. Campion had yet more reason to be worried about Young Boss's health, for he was so teasy and so easily hurried up she did not know where she was. "Chill has turned inward and is working him," she told her husband. "He is like Farmer's bull when the bee-swarm settled on his hide."

When she said that something was working Tristram she was not far out.

Had he done what he could for Ern? He glanced aside at that stolen kiss and his heart burned. He could not repent him of that. No, till the end of time 'twas his. No right to it, but what did that matter?

He would put that a-one-side and think of Ern—poor chap sent into foreign parts by his old dragon of a father. First time in his life Ern had thought seriously of a maid, and there he was, off and out of it. A terrible bad business for Ern. For the maid, too.

The marriage with Farmer might not be to her liking. Her mother might have nagged at her till she was willing to do anything to get away. No one could tell what poor maid might not have

suffered before she give in. Left there, she was, between them two, he begging of her and her mother scolding, scolding . . .

He, Tristram, had promised to do his best for Ern. His best, so help him God.

What had he done? Stammered out a word or two, then run away. Never gone nigh her again. Funked it he had.

He fed the mangolds to his beasts—in, fattening for the Christmas market—as savagely as if he were smiting an enemy, splashed out the pig-wash with a curse and went about as good a farm as any west of Truro with an air of bitter discontent.

Missed his chance, he had. When he had had the opportunity he should have talked straight to Janey, put it to her. What had he said? Nothing to the point.

Must have been bewitched.

He had sworn to plead with her for his cousin, for Ern, who was all the brother he had.

If he had only known before he promised that 'twas Janey—and Tristram, walking over a field, groaned until the birds of the air stopped twittering and his sheep dog thrust a wet nose into his hand.

How could he plead with her for another—even though that other was Ern?

IX

The date of the wedding stood out, an invisible black mark, on the farm calendar.

Tristram's conscience—it was probably his conscience—gnawed at itself, biting down to the quick. Something had ought to be done.

Didn't ought to have tossed for the maid—no, indeedy. But as they had, he should not have picked up the penny without a look-see. To have done so made him responsible, and he belonged to make a move of some kind.

What could he do ?

Many the night during those two weeks that he held communion of thought and dream with the erring maid. He argued out the matter, convinced her, told her what to do and found her everything that was sweet and biddable. Alas, that dreams should be at once so satisfactory and unsatisfying.

Inexorable time brought him to the wedding eve and he had done nothing, and yet his conscience was sore. He went early to bed because he was too restless to sit in his chair.

Later he discovered that he was too restless to lie in his bed.

X

The following day he was afoot early. He shaved with greater care than usual, pulled on his new riding-breeches, went into the vegetable garden and, finding a late half-blown rose on the big bush, set it in his coat. Weddings in that part of the country were casual affairs. People would not waste a working day to see—as they put it—“two fools made into one.” In all probability Janey

would go by herself up the field-path which was the short cut to the church on the hill, while his uncle would drive round by the road. She would not drive with him in his gig till she was married.

During the dark hours Tristram had learned that he could not let Janey go blindfold into her new life. He could not come at what he wanted to say to her, only that he must see her again. He would know then.

He had little appetite for the fry and cake his housekeeper had ready. "Have a good supper for me," he told her, "for I'll likely be sharp-set time I come again."

"Be tha going to market?" Looked mighty fine he did—all of six foot and filling the wooden chair at top of table from arm to arm with the good breadth of him.

"Well, 'tisn't exackerly market; but I be going to do some bidding—for another chap."

"Man's business is always best done by himself."

"Not when man's away."

"When 'tis a matter of importance, he shouldn't be away."

Prince, the bony farm horse which carried the young farmer to Rosewithiel, was not over-speedy, but as eleven was the hour at which country marriages took place, there was time and to spare. Tristram, although his mind was a-swither, had made some sort of plan. He would meet-up with Janey, by chance as it were, on her way to church and have it out with her. Accordingly, when he reached the downs, he turned off the main road

into a lane which ended in a tree-set bottom. Three gates led into as many fields. Tristram tethered his horse to a tree at some distance from the path that ran whitely up the side of the nearest, and himself stood back out of sight. The morning, though autumnal, was clear and still, the sunlight streaming redly over the few remaining red leaves of bush and tree. An adder whipped across his foot and disappeared into the brake. Always a great place for snakes, this bottom, and that reminded him of the smell at the Rock Flow where, only a month ago, he had waited for this same maid.

Not altogether a warm day, yet at the thought of Janey he had grown suddenly hot—that voice and the bit of soft, sunburnt neck.

He must not be thinking that way. He had got to put words together that should convince her—but oh, dearie dear, how could he when the scent of her hair was still in his nostrils, driving him crazy?

He clenched his hands, stamping on the damp ground. He must master himself or he would fail of his purpose.

At about a quarter of eleven, a group of maidens climbed the stile into the field, and walked up the path. Tristram recognized among them a certain Miss Hicks—Miss Hicks of Tregear. The girls with whom she was walking were strangers to him, but he knew Miss Hicks well enough. Some sort of connection she was. He supposed she had come over to help Farmer get the house ready for his new wife.

Just like her, too, for she was as kind a soul as you could meet.

Getting on for eleven now, and Janey late. Prinking herself, but no need for that when she had them eyes and that naughty smile. Prinking herself for Old Boss.

Then, even as before, he caught the sound of a singing voice and his heart went nigh to choking him :—

“ I know where I'm going
And I know who's going with me.
I know who I love,
But the Dear knows who I'll marry.”

The other maidens were disappearing over the crest of the hill. No one else was about.

Tristram stepped out of the undergrowth and went to meet Janey.

XI

She showed no surprise at the sight of him— but then, she would know Farmer had asked him to ride over for the wedding.

“ 'Tis a long time since we seen you,” she said, and smiled at him so that he forgot why he was there.

“ I been wanting to come,” he told her. “ Not a day I wasn't thinking long—” he pulled himself up, concluding lamely, “ of the downs.”

"Of course the downs is home to you," she said, "and I feel like that for the sea. We've only been here since my dad died. He was a fisherman and we lived to Port Isaac."

"You'd like to go back?" he asked eagerly.

The little pointed face, set with slanting green eyes, the eyes of a pisky, was wistful. "Got to stay here," she said, on a falling note.

"Oh, no," he cried, "no—" and then again he remembered.

"Janey," he said desperately, and the free use of her name did not seem to surprise her. "Janey, I've ridden over for a talk with you." His voice roughened, for it was difficult to get the words over his lips.

"And I'm glad to see you," she answered simply.

Her sweetness bothered him. "Before 'tis too laäte," he blurted.

"Too late?"

He was standing on the sward one side of the path, she on the other, and he felt it between them like a wall. Inside his mind was a similar wall, but it seemed of no greater consistency than a wall of mist. "Janey," he said, in his fear almost leaning backward, "Janey, have 'ee thought what 'tis you'm doing? I don't say my uncle wouldn't make any woman a good husband, but you'm young and he 'edn't."

Janey's face lost its smile. "No," she said, "Farmer Hawken bain't young."

"And you don't love'n."

"But he know that,"

"If you was to wait a bit—well, you do know there's someone as you could love."

She looked up; she smiled at him and Tristram wanted to run—in two directions. "Meaning?" said she.

He nearly told her.

XII

"If you could love Ernest," was what he should have said, but he could not bring his tongue to frame the words. He muttered in a husky voice, "Janey, don't 'ee—don't 'ee marry Farmer."

A pause, then Janey's clear lilting voice, "I don't want to."

Tristram's strength came back, and so happy did he feel that he wanted to dance and sing. Poor little maid, she had been going to marry his uncle because—well, no doubt because her mother thought him a good match for a village girl. "If you don't want to, you shan't."

She did not answer, but her pose was that of one who waited. It was for him to save her and—oh, yes—he would. "Mrs. Osborn wanted for you to take him?"

"Grandfer is failing and Farmer would have given them a home."

"I—" he began, and recollected himself. "Ern, too, I'm sure."

"She've never liked Ern Hawken." The girl glanced up-meadow towards the church, and

Tristram realized that this was indeed the eleventh hour. If she broke off the marriage now she would be the talk of the countryside. Her mother, too, would be against her, for Farmer was one of the Powers That Be.

He must admit that things were pretty desperate.

Why had it not occurred to him to ride over earlier? And why was not Ern there to attend to his own business? Mrs. Champion's remark, "When 'tis a matter of importance, man should not be away," came back to Tristram. Ah, now, then—Mrs. Champion. A wise woman, that one. She might be able to help him.

Not a bad idea.

"Look here, Janey, you do trust me?"

Trust the dear silly? Oh, bless him! She lifted her long lashes, and smiled, distracting an honest man from the doing of his duty. "Ah, don't 'ee now," he implored her, "for 'tis my fault that Ern's gone and I've got to make it up to him, and if you do look at me I can't."

"Go on, Tristram, I won't look at 'ee," and she stood before him, quiet as a slow-burning fuse.

He made another attempt. "I do want to be your friend, my God I do. And I want—I want to do the fair thing by Ern."

Her lips were trembling. Why? "I know you do."

He must keep his mind on the matter in hand and try not to see. "If I leave 'ee stay here, Mrs. Osborn won't give 'ee no peace, but—well, how if you was to goo away?"

In spite of a secret resolution her lips went up at the corner. It was obvious that the suggestion did not displease. That disturbing dimple—er,—had a freckle lodged in it. The faintest gold speck, a fairy of a freckle!

“Where'll I go?”

“My housekeeper would put you up and look after you till—” he found it difficult to keep back a groan. “Oh, I'd write off at once. You—you wouldn't have long to wait.”

Her voice was small and meek. “I will do what you think best.”

XIII

For all he was five and twenty and owned a five-hundred-acre farm, Tristram cut a caper. “What a facer for Uncle. Serve him right, too. At his time of life he shouldn't be thinking of a maid like you.”

He ran for Prince, and Janey, looking after him, felt a flutter of fear. She had let him sweep her away on a tide of adventure—yes, because she wanted to go.

And she meant to go, and that was all there was to it. Her heart was beating quickly for she was as excited as he, but when he came back he found waiting for him the same demure maiden.

Lucky chance Prince was so strong. Fifteen miles carrying a double burthen! Ah, but she was only a little maid. He altered the saddle—now, then . . .

They rode from the downs to St. Ryn, and though the sun was weak with age it did its best to shine on them, but they hardly noticed.

Janey warm against him. The ends of her glinty hair blown against his cheek, the scent of her. He could not speak. He only knew that he was holding her.

Walking up hill and down (that is, most of the way), and riding over the flat, they came within sight of the great headland on which was Tristram's farm. The house was sunk in a fold of the land, sheltered thereby from storms and more. A top window, shining with the cold red of sunset, offered a welcome, and Tristram thought of the kitchen and Janey pouring tea for him in its twilight warmth. Presently he must think of Ern, but not—not on their ride together.

No; for the moment she was his—in his arms—so close they seemed to have one breathing. They were the two halves that made a whole, and he was at one with her. He pointed out the window. "Home," he said, but he could not see her face.

XIV

Prince, not much the worse for his day's work, turned into the yard at Vose and stopped by the broad doorstep. Gently Tristram lowered Janey. "Run in by," he said, with sorrow in his heart; "as soon as I have seen to Prince I'll be with you."

Janey came to the horse's head and, catching hold of his brown forelock, kissed him between the eyes; and Tristram, poor fellow, saw her do it.

As he led the horse away, however, he remembered that she would have a meal with him before Mrs. Champion took her to the cottage, and his heart stirred under its load.

Sit at his table she would and eat with him and—oh, the sacred joy of things.

He came back from stabling the horse to find her still waiting on the step. "Why, Janey—"

"Oh, Tris, I be so tired and I—I didn't like to go in by myself."

He became anxiously aware that what had been a time of heavenly delight for him might have wearied her. "'Twas a long ride for 'ee."

Half-lifting her arms, she looked at him pleadingly. "Carry me in, Tris."

Tired and stiff? The poor little maid and he too full of himself to notice.

He was all tenderness and contrition, but in one corner of his heart blazed the desire to hold her again in his arms—just once again, if only for a moment. Up those two heavenly steps.

Picking up the soft bundle of life which was Janey, he carried her into the house. With her clasped to his breast, his spirits rose and, for a moment, he was a boy.

"Mrs. Champion," he shouted, "come and see what I got."

The old woman came in from the dairy. She

threw up her hands. "My Gor, Maister, if you bain't carrying the bride over the drexel!"

In his surprise he nearly dropped Janey, for it was what he had done, to be sure; and a man carries no woman but his new-made wife over the threshold of his home. He hadn't thought of that—nor Janey neither, or she wouldn't—of course she wouldn't.

She was slipping out of his arms, growing momentarily more distant. "Well, now," Mrs. Campion was saying, "you might have telled me. Who hasta got?"

"This is Miss Osborn," he said lamely, "I've brought her over because—"

They waited, the old woman and the young, for the end of the sentence.

"Yes, why?" said Janey softly, and there was something in her light voice, something— He has a feeling that whereas it had been he and she coming in to Mrs. Campion, now it was Janey and Mrs. Campion together and he by himself.

"Why?" he cried, and for no reason felt suddenly indignant. "To save 'ee from marrying my uñcle."

Mrs. Campion, recollecting a matter of importance, had taken something from the mantelshelf. "A letter came after you was gone this morning," and she handed it to him, but he was too fully occupied to open it. "'Tis from foreign parts."

He continued to regard his tantalizing maid. "Oh, Tris," said she in innocent surprise, "but I told you I didn't want to marry him."

The words, as uttered now, seemed to have a different meaning. "You was going to, though."

She shook her head. "Don't you really know? Why, I telled him I wouldn't, and in a tare he went driving to Tregear and asked Miss Hicks. You must have seen her going up over hill with her two friends."

"And you?" he said hoarsely.

"I thought I'd like to see Old Boss married—"

Tristram opened his mouth and shut it again. Bewilderment had dropped on him like a net on a shoal of fish. "I," he stammered, "I was thinking of Ern."

"And me," said Janey, with finality, "I never give Ern a thought."

XV

He had run away with Janey and she was asking him why. Tristram could only say lamely that Ern had wanted her terrible bad.

"All of us in turn," laughed she, "every maid in Rosewithiel, I do believe. Did ought to have been a Turk, that one."

Mrs. Campion had gone into the lincay with a remark about supper, and Janey was still asking him why.

"I did mean to act fair by Ern," Tristram said, and grew suddenly cheerful; "but I can't do it, I can't and—" he caught a willing woman in his arms—"I don't care."

XVI

When later that evening they read Ern's letter, it was found to contain the news that usually comes from a chap like Ern. He had met a maid aboard ship and he hoped to get hitched up with she.

Janey, sitting on Tristram's knee while Mrs. Campion washed the dishes, began to sing, adapting the words :—

“ I know where I'm going
And I know who's going with me.
I know who I love,
And 'tis he, sure, that I'll marry.”

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

"If Mick were to home, he would soon have potato patch weeded and th' grass cut," Micho Dugga told herself. She stood at the door of her cottage, looking across the neglected garden. Wanted a man to teal it, so it did, but her son was in South Afriky and would not be back before the turn of the year, if then. She herself, what with the sewing and the tending on the village women when they had their babies, she had enough to do.

The tall, dun stems of seeded grass shook, as if the wind had got at their roots. Her sharp, country eyes detected a sinuous movement, a gleam of warm brown. Day-fall had brought out the stoats. "Thirsty as a bullock, they be," she said, "but they bain't thirsty for water."

Micho was more interested in the stoats—eight of them—running fiercely, like angry thoughts, than in the red of the evening sky. Flames in the west, and fainter flames in the east, a canopy of colour over her tiny remote cottage, one room down and one up. The cottage stood on a hill. 'Forty-seven' miles away she saw the sun rise over the round of the world. At the bottom of a long descent she saw it drop into the fire-shot grey of the sea. Top of the earth, like a hat on a man's head!

“A terrible great view!” Whoever wanted to see that far? Not she. The grey stone house and the bit of flat garden, it was plain in the sight of all—like a wart. Not a thing she did but the village down in the hollow knew. It had mattered once, but of course, now that she was old—

On her table lay breadths of material. She was making a gown for Mrs. Rosevear’s Rowena. Maid was having of her first baby at Christmas, and thought to wear it as soon as she was about again, but Micho Dugga knew better. She did not tell what she knew—at least not often. People had to beg and beg before she would.

Not a matter of money with her. She made more than she needed. The stocking in the old chest was crammed as full as it would hold, and every week there was more to go in. She liked work, she did, and she wouldn’t tell things—unless she had a mind to.

Rowena was asking for the dress, and if Micho were to finish it that week she must make the most of the light. She did not care to work after she had put a match to the lamp, drawn down the dark-blue blinds, drawn across it the red curtains. That was her hour, the hour to which she looked forward throughout the day. Her tablecloth was dark, and when she lighted the hanging lamp, brightness fell from under its shade, making a pool.

She stood for a moment to watch the trailing stoats, then turned into the cottage. Through the window the glow of the west fell on to the table, on to the purple of the fine woollen gown. The

woman seated herself on the bench and the red light fell over her shoulder as she set the stitches, turning the fray under her thumb and thinking.

She was not working as swiftly as she belonged to. Her mind sprang about and she paused, went on again. Restless, she was, as a girl expecting her sweetheart.

A long while since she had done aught but turn from one bit of work to another. Dreams were for young people, so they were, and she had had hers—and much good they had done her !

Would have liked a husband so well as other women ; a man to dig in the garden, summer-time, and set by the fire o' winter evenings. Someone to go up around with, and talk to—but, well, she couldn't put another in Ben's place. He had not treated her right, but there it was.

Queer fit that she should be dreaming again after all this time. She could have said that she was listening for a certain step. Dusk and his step on the hard country of the road ! He had not come that way for a-pretty-many years.

She looked up, hearing the click of the gate. Last night she had 'seen' his face in the pool of lamp-light. She felt no surprise, therefore, that the man hesitating on the drexel should be Farmer Williams of West Vose.

Last time he had come to Noon Vears he had been a young man—both of them young—now he was middle-aged and had grown so fat the jelly of him shook. Some hill to come up, so it was, and he was panting like a wind-broken snail.

He stood, looking in, looking across at Micho Dugga. Physically distressed his expression was also deprecating. Though he was a strong farmer, had lately bought the land he tealed, he would not venture to cross this threshold unless given leave.

The woman was in no hurry to ask him in. She put her work aside and went to the door. "You?" she said.

He stood before her like a child whose misdoings have been brought home to it, and who wants to be taken back into favour. "I never done you no 'arm," he said anxiously.

"You can come in," and he followed her like a whipped dog. "There—I don't bear you no ill-will, Ben; nor," she hesitated—"nor the boy don't neither."

"He know then?"

"Village don't like for anyone to grow up iggorant."

Williams crossed the flagged blue floor, took the chair at the end of the table. He was tired and under his eyes the patches of loose skin were creasy full. Micho Dugga began to fold away the breadths of purple. "'Tes a braäve walk for you from Vose—nowadays."

"Seemed natural to walk, somehow," the man told her. "And, anyway, the mare didn't 'pear to be right at all."

In the days of their mutual youth he had not had a horse. His walking to-day told her that he was come by way of the past.

"What be you wanting of me, Ben?"

He hesitated, leaning on the table and looking anxiously across at the woman whom, to please his father, he had left. She understood—all the things he didn't and, if she didn't hold the past against him, why, she might tell him what to do. "You—you always had the sight."

The bitterness she had felt when she saw him at the door had given place to pity. Poor chap. Poor old chap. "That's of it," she agreed. "I can 'see,' but I can't do nothing."

"You can tell I what to do, and 'tis all I do want." His fat reddish face crinkled in an annoyed self-pity. "There's someone who is ill-wishing of me, and I got to know who 'tis. Things is all turning bad. Last week old sow ate her farrow, and now mare's acting as if she'm bewitched. Sure, I don't want to lose she."

The crimsons were dying off the great arch from Brown Willhay to the sea, and it was dark in the room. Micho lit the lamp and drew the red curtains across the blue blind. "You got to 'see' for yourself," she said. "Abide there while I get the glass."

She ran—a girl again—up the boarded-off stairs, but, once in the upper room, put a hand to her breast and sank down on the side of the bed. To see him once more, to have him sitting there below.

As the years between were such a many, she belonged to have forgotten, yet her heart was beating like on that first day . . .

She must pull herself together, for poor dear needed her help, yes fye, and she would do what

she could. Once before he had come to her in distress—his father had wanted him to marry Annie Nichols because she had been left money, and he had come to her, Micho Dugga.

She had not been able to prevent him doing of it, neither. A man travels his own road.

Now again . . .

She wiped her tears, tried to still the trembling of her body. She must keep steady, but oh, 'twas troubling, so it was. A man digged a grave with his tongue and fuled it in and you thought that was the end, but the ghostes crep out. You could not lay them. Heave their heads up they did, spite of the years and that.

She took the mirror from the wall and went downstairs. She did not need to look in the glass; could 'see' in the pool of light; and even when she shut her eyes. It grew on you—'seeing.' But it was different with Ben.

"Stand there, your back to the light. There, so that it fall on the glass. Now, look in steady while I say the words." She muttered the ancient formula which, after all, was prayer—of a sort. He could not hear what she said. It was not right that he should. He only knew that the incantation was repeated three times and that—gradually—the polished surface of the mirror was growing dark—like water when it is near the boil.

She hushed and waited. If he 'saw,' she knew who it would be. The woman had not kept her mouth shut, and it was common talk that Williams had cheated her.

"There's a cloud," he said, his voice thick.

Micho stood at his elbow. "And in the cloud?"

"Something—" he blinked to clear his sight, "something black. She's her back turned, but I know who 'tis."

"Ah!"

"'Tis Sandra Treffry."

"Why should she ill-wish you?"

"We fallied out over Gorm Medder. I told she not to bid for't at the sale, that if she didn't I'd see she wasn't the loser. You do know the farm was sold in one lot and so she couldn't have bid. Yet she think she's a right to that field. But 'tis my farm and I am not going to give she the pick o' the land."

Certain of his righteousness he was, but Mrs. Treffry told a different tale. She had been offered the field before ever the farm was put up to auction and he had asked her not to take it but to come in with him and buy the whole. She had agreed to that. Then he had gone privily to the owner and made an offer, which the man had accepted.

Micho did not challenge his story. It was nothing to her. "But Sandra Treffry have a dark power," she said.

He gave the glass to her and she turned it face down on the table.

"Don't I know it?" he cried. "Isn't that why I'm here to-night?"

The woman shook as if caught in a sudden breath of arctic air. Yes, fye, Ben asked, and people—people like herself—gave.

"Bible can tell 'ee what's best to do," was all she said.

"Yes, sure." This was an oracle he had often consulted. He had done so in this very cottage, and he went to the shelf.

Micho's heart contracted. Ah, then, so he, too, he had not forgotten? The book was old, with time-browned pages and a number of scratchy entries—births and deaths—on the inside of the cover. Williams gave it to her and fetched the door-key.

"'Twill tell us right," he said, cheerfully expectant.

She set the book between them on the table, then, taking Ben's hand—oh, the touch of him—held it while she uttered the prescribed formula, and opened the book. Shutting his eyes, he laid the key blindly on the page. They bent greying heads to read :—

"Agree with thine adversary quickly."

The man stood back. "What do it mean?"

"It mean that if Sandra Treffry think she've a right to Gorm Medder," she said reluctantly, "you've got to let she have it."

The red of his face darkened, his lips turned bluish, but he looked set as Vose Head. "I can't, my dear; I can't." Gorm was worth more to him than a farrow of pigs, more even than his mare. "Set you down a minute and I'll tell 'ee for why."

She obeyed and, leaning on the table, stared into the darkly bright pool below the lamp. A dark surround of cloth and the splash of light.

"'Tis this way. I've got Peter coming back from Canada to help me with the farm. 'Tain't to be supposed he'd hold with my giving a bite out of it. You know how Gorm lie, side on to the sea. That bit of coast has its vally . . ."

He spoke from the shadow beyond the lamp and she could hardly hear what he said. She was listening to the cries of drowning men. Driven out of her course by a succession of Atlantic gales, the ship had struck a rock. She knew Peter, Ben's only son, by sight, and she was 'seeing' him in the pool.

A drowned, pallid face—Peter would not come home to help his father teal West Vose.

"Then I got to put by for Jennifer's marriage penny."

Jennifer? Micho was not 'seeing' now, but she knew. Luke Hellier was some handsome, and the maid was snaking out to meet him unbeknownst. She met him in the fields by day and, after dark, in the deep lanes—and Luke was a married man. No need of marriage pennies for the like of Jennifer.

"Your grandchildren," said Micho quietly, "will be like my son—bastards."

He looked up, more than startled. "What be saying, you?"

Her face—wide and with eyes slightly aslant—was that of a sleep-walker. "At long last," she told him in a stilly way that was empty of personal emotion, "things do be evened up. You'd be wise if you gived Sandra the medder."

He proffered a last excuse. "I got to think of me old age."

"Yours?" She was beholding the heart at which the knives of Mrs. Treffry's ill-will were jabbing—that diseased, fat heart.

"Year or two after Peter come home I want to goo out of the farm and live 'independent'! Got to save all I can for that."

She put a hand between her eyes and the pool of light. She had seen, and she did not want to see. The knowledge that she had was too heavy—it was the end. No, for even now . . . if he would take heed. A following fate was at his heel, crowding upon him. It might be delayed—oh, surely—turned aside.

"Ben, my dear life," she said, and her voice trembled with the urgency of her unchanging heart. "Sandra Treffry's cottage is between this and the farm. You pass it going home. Ben—stop and settle up with she. 'Tis most urgent that you should."

"I'd rather risk—"

"You dunno what 'tis you risk."

"But you'll help me all you can?"

Her voice rose. "Ah, my dear, I haven't no dark power. Don't 'ee delay, Ben. Agree 'with her . . ."

He stared, a little shaken. "I—I dunno."

"She'm stronger'n you."

"Stronger'n me? Aw, now—" He felt uncomfortable. Was there real danger? He doubted, could not quite believe. "Do you mean that if

Sandra Treffry think she have a grievance against me, I'm to give in about it and let her have her way ? ”

Micho nodded eagerly. “ I do that.”

“ Tedn't jonic, then.” It wasn't fair, indeed it was not, and if it had been other than Micho who urged this on him he would have laughed. But Micho—he could not go against her. Yet, give up Gorm ! If it had been Cunegar, or Pigs' Park, but Gorm—

What was Micho saying in that queer voice ?
“ In a matter of life and death—land is dirt.”

“ Death ? ” he repeated, thinking of the mare. Lose she, would he ? And all for an old woman's spite. He would like to let out her black blood, so he would. He had come on a fool's errand, for here was no aid but only advice he did not want to take. Not if he could anyway help it, no. Well, well, nothing to do but clop over home again.

He got up gloomily and found Micho between him and the door. It seemed as if she could not let him go. She talked, and every word she said made him feel more uneasy. Them tales of hers, true they were and he knew it. Might be a good thing to do as she was telling. Might be—well, he didn't know, he would think it over.

“ Agree with thine adversary *quickly*.” Micho wouldn't hear of his thinking it over.

“ ‘ This very night, ’ ” said she, and her words struck through his unwillingness. Something outside Micho, outside his mind, was ‘ requiring ’ this

of him. Well, then, he'd—he'd do it. See Sandra that very night. On his way back—

“Haven't got a drop of something, I suppose?”

“Don't keep nothing in the house.”

Poor dear looked tired, done. “But if you'll wait I could make 'ee a cup o' tea. 'Twould hearten 'ee for a walk back—and no trouble, no trouble at all.”

“No, no; I must be getting on. 'Tis a long way across they commons.”

She could remember when it had been too short for her reputation, and her smile was thin. Not that she had ever borne him ill-will. As she saw the matter, it had been her fault that she had gotten a hurt at his hands. A woman should not trust a man; if she did, she must take the consequences—and every mother's daughter belong to know that.

Moreover, to-night, the past was remote and unimportant. Between herself and Ben was the tie—the tie that links a man to his woman—and he had proved it by coming to her. At the bottom and at the back of things was his reliance on her and her inevitable response. 'Tisn't the living alone that makes a body feel lonely.

Micho went with her man to the door—to the gate—then stood in the lane to watch him take the field path which led across the unfenced lots to the commons. The last time she would be watching him from her cottage.

A light was burning in Sandra Treffry's window, and with a shudder, Micho thought of the widow's thoughts running, dark and fierce, running like

stoats on a trail. She went in and shut the door between herself and them. Although she had not 'the power' she could pray.

The night was moonless but, above the sea, light lingered. Williams crossed the field of ripening barley, the field of lucerne, the freshly-ploughed land. The soil was light and sandy, yet for a tired man this last was heavy going. The excitement of his talk with Micho was passing and he realized that he was weary. The plod, plod of one foot after another was as much as he could manage, and it was foolish of Micho, so it was, to have asked him to see Mrs. Treffry that night. Later on.

Perhaps.

After all, wrongdoing was a matter of law and, as Mrs. Treffry had no writing to show, his conscience was clear. Besides, how did he know Micho Dugga wasn't in league with the woman? Once on a time he had promised to marry Micho and it hadn't been convenient. Maybe she was still holding of it against him.

He couldn't be sure . . .

A piece of unfenced road took him past the gate of Mrs. Treffry's cottage. Although the red blind was drawn, he knew that she was behind it. He thought of his wife. If she ever heard tell of what he had been doing that evening she'd give him no peace. Say he had been 'fried for a fool,' she would.

More especially if he gave way about Gorm Meddow. No—best sleep on it. Perhaps he would ride over the morrow's morn and come to some

arrangement. He would not give Sandra Treffry the meadow, but he might let her rent it. He would do it because she was a poor widow and he had a good heart. Witching him? He wasn't afraid of that.

Fulish of Micho to think he could stop on his way home, and he so tired; stop and go in and settle the matter. Woman would think he was maazed. No, to-morrow . . .

* * * *

In the hush of her cottage Micho sat with her back to the lamp. The grey walls ringed her from the black of the night, and about them the whips of feathered tamarisk were stirless in the still air. She was muttering to herself, saying the same words over and over. But although she prayed, she also listened, waiting.

From somewhere in her neglected garden a thin scream of anguish cut the dark. The prayer was hushed on her lips. "They stoats have made their kill," she thought, shivering.

They would no longer be thirsty.

* * * *

In the valley bottom some labouring men, on their way to work the following morning, found Farmer Williams with his face towards the farm he had lately bought, and with his hands clutching the earth.

His death, the doctors said at the inquest, had been due to fatty degeneration of the heart.

SIMPLE SILAS

SIMPLE SILAS

IN the shelter of the tamarisk, against the low whitewashed wall, Tom Hawken stood with little Gray Olivey. He was troubled because his father had said he wasn't to marry the daughter "of that hussy down to Pleasant Springs," and he loved Gray, had been courting her since they sat on the same bench at school.

"Your dad, now, pity he'm away all summer." The sound of a gramophone floated from the open window of the cottage. Sarah Olivey had some of her chaps "in."

"He is home winter," Gray said. After all, mammy was his affair, her "goings-on" ought not to spoil young lives.

"Anyway he's simple, he don't understand."

"Understand more'n we give him credit for. You know that scar between his eyes?"

"The scar he has had since he was a child?"

"Well, times he sits looking at Mam in his quiet way, and the scar, it turns red. I—I don't like it then. Don't know for why, but I don't."

"Pity he don't do more than look at your mam. 'Tis hard lines on we, my peach."

Gray thought so, too—such a mother and such a queer, helpless sort of father! The latter was kind enough, but people said he was moon-struck.

Certainly he never seemed to think she had any claim on him—if she had!

She had not thought of that. “Oh, Tom,” she said with a shiver, “how I hate this—this sort of—” she did not know how to put it, but she thought of the furtive comings and goings, the wild merriment and secret drinking.

The arm about her tightened. He wanted to take her out of it, ay, and he would. “Look here, honey-life, I’ll ask Parson Jacka to put the banns up. Us could live small till old man come around. He’d miss me on the farm, so he would. Wouldn’t get no one else to work for’n as I’ve done.”

But she shook her head. “Don’t want your dad hurried up because of me, dear. Us’ll wait till my father come, and then I’ll talk to he.”

“We have waited a long time.”

She turned her face to his shoulder, whispering, promising, but in her heart she was uneasy.

She had ventured once to remonstrate with her mother and had been told, with a quick slap on the cheek, to mind her business. “’Tis my life, all I got, and I’ll please myself what I do with it.”

And when the men jeered at her father—in spite of the little doubt she thought of him as that—when they jeered and called him rough, old-fashioned names, he looked vaguely at them with, “It don’t trouble me.”

Was that true? Did he not mind that his wife was a bye-word? Once, in the years gone by, he must have cared for her as Gray cared for Tom.

She was still handsome, and Gray knew she had been called the Belle of St. Ryn.

When they were first married, father must have cared. Poor father—what a time he must have had of it.

He seemed indifferent now, but was he as indifferent as he seemed? Gray was not sure, not quite. He behaved as if he were and yet—

As a child, from a corner of the disorderly home, she had often watched him staring with round, dull eyes at his wife, eyes behind which was a thought. Sarah, daffing with some man, never seemed to notice the quiet figure by the fire. No doubt she had grown used to him.

"Your father ought to be on his way home," Tom said. He had had enough of this waiting, and there was the house at Towans. His dad would let him have it if he married—that is, if he married with his consent. He might let him have it anyhow.

"He'll sure walk in one day this week or next," Gray said. During the summer Silas Olivey pushed a grindstone through the big towns, but as soon as there was an "r" in the month, he came back to St. Ryn. By trade he was a pig-butcher, and, being clever at his job, was much in request from September to April. Come autumn, and every farm had pigs turned out to fatten in its corn-cropped fields, or shut up with nothing to do but eat; every cottage, too. The country people were waiting for Silas; killing-stool, salt and barrel in readiness; waiting for him and the little sharp

knife with which he made his quick stab, with which, afterwards, he cut up the grey-white carcasses.

"I'll be glad when he come," Gray said. "Things is quieter, then; oh, how I wish when he go, he'd take her with'n."

"Much good wishing," Tom said bitterly. "Here honey-maid, 'tis getting late. Give I a proper kiss, and I'll be off home."

A day or two later Gray woke to the click of their gate, and, looking from her little window under the eaves, saw Silas Olivey trundling his grindstone up the path. It was a lovely sea-blue, sun-golden morning, and the man, clean and small and brown, seemed part of it. Gray wondered whether he were glad to come back. Her young-girl efforts could not keep the place sweet . . .

She roused her mother. "Here is father come home for the pig-killing."

It appeared, however, that this was not the case. "I don't want to kill no more pigs," Silas said, when told that Andrew of Lower Harlyn and Woon of Tricceth had sent for him. "Pigs? There's worse than pigs trotting around the world. Why should I kill pigs?"

He was standing before his wife, a bag that he had pulled out of his breeches pocket in his hand; and Gray noticed that the scar on his forehead was an angry red.

"Somebody must kill them," Sarah said placidly. Silas had his funny notions, but he got over them, and everything went on as before. No good taking any notice. She put out her hand for the bag.

He untied it, poured the contents into her lap. Fat pieces of silver—

Silas had few needs. The lee side of a hedge did him in summer for a sleeping-place, and the cottagers and Back Lane people for whom he ground knives and scissors often added bite and sup to the pence they paid. He always brought home money.

Sarah gave him no thanks. "What'll I say to Andrew?"

"Say I only came home because of the sea . . ."

"The sea, you gomeril?"

Silas looked puzzled. He came home because the sea called him. In the spring Sarah drove him out over the hills that lay between St. Ryn and the big towns. All summer he heard a distant calling, and when the leaves grew thin on the trees, the calling came more loudly, so loudly that he had to obey it. This time there had been something mixed with the calling, another note, a note that troubled and yet drew him.

"I've heard the sea," he said slowly, "and now I can go back." He knew that he had not obeyed the urging of that other voice, that he did not want to. He wanted to go . . .

"But," said Sarah, "there's our pig!"

"Oh—our'n."

"Surely you'll kill he? Fine chap he is. I put'n to arrish in Helyar's field." She smiled to herself over her thoughts, unconscious of those moving in the minds of husband and daughter.

Silas glanced through the doorway at the eight-acre field opposite his cottage—Helyar's field! A

good farmer, he would be there for the ploughing, for the sowing, for the cutting and carrying!

His—Silas's—pig, gleaning the dropped grain in Helyar's field! Yes, but that was why he had come home. That was the something beyond the insistent calling, calling of the sea. He had to kill the pig that gleaned in Helyar's field.

"Come and see him. For a fortnight now he has been in, feeding. He must be all of twenty score." She got up, led the way down the garden to a tarred shed against the wall. Within was a heavy white animal, which looked at man and wife with a confident friendliness. From them came the constant supplies of appetizing food . . .

"Look as if he'd weigh more than twenty score, don't he?" Whatever Silas had in that strange mind of his, he was no true countryman if he wasn't proud of such a pig. She stood back a little that her husband might note the animal's breadth and heaviness. "You'll kill this'n for me?" she said.

But Silas hardly seemed to see the white pig. He was looking dreamily at his wife. "Iss, sure, I'll kill'n."

Mrs. Olivey laughed out. She had known the sight of his own pig would do the trick. Once his little knife slipped into that throat, he would forget that he did not mean to do any more killing, and all would be hunky-dory. She knew how to manage him, she did. Before the week was out she would have him working away at his trade as usual.

"When'll you do it?"

"Go in and het up the water. I'll kill'n now."

"Now? My Lor'—and me with nothing ready." She hurried to the house. "Gray, run up to Shoppe and get me salt an' nitre. Your father's going to kill pig."

The girl hesitated. "But, Mammy, there's a bill owing—"

"Plenty to pay it with." Pulling out a handful of silver, she put some into the girl's hand. "Your hat now, and be quick." She turned to Silas. "Got your knife?"

"Knife's keen, but I'll give it an extra whet."

The grindstone stood by the porch, and, going to it, he treadled for a moment. When Gray, in a clean, freshly-ironed blue cotton, came down the path, she was surprised to find he had wheeled the little hand-cart to the gate. Did that mean he was really going? Her heart sank, for she had a fear that this time he would not come back.

Yet, indeed, why should he? But—well, it was hard on Tom and herself. If her father went, with him would go their last chance of bringing Mammy to a better mind. She looked at the old round stone, and her tears rose. "Father . . ."

He had run the wheel into the road, when her voice, pitiful and sweet, stayed him. He looked at her, but not as if she were anyone he knew.

"'Tis me, Gray."

"Gray?" he said vacantly, and shook his head.

He was very queer, more so than ever before, but she must try and get through his queerness. Underneath he was kind. "Father—"

He glanced at her, a pretty maid, and she had tears in her eyes, but she was nothing to him. "Bain't."

She hurried on, unheeding. "I want you to do something for me."

He was troubled that she should add to his burthen, but perhaps if he agreed, she would go away and let him be. "What is it?"

"I want to marry Tom Hawken."

"Fulish of 'ee."

"Father, are you really going away?"

His face had a look of haste, confusion. "If only I can get off, before—"

"Oh, no—you mustn't. You must take her with you."

"Taäke?"

"Take Mammy."

He was standing on the path between the two gnarled tamarisks, and the light fell on a perplexed brown face. He looked back at the whitewashed cottage, and it was as if he were seeing a heap of garbage. "Mucky," he said.

Gray perceived, or thought she did, that her mother's dirty ways had disgusted him. Twenty years of slovenliness—she glanced back as he had done, saw the dead mouse that had been thrown out days ago, the potato peelings, the cabbage stalks.

"I know," she said sympathetically, "and no doubt it has been hard on you; but, when you married her, you must have seen that her ways—well, they weren't clean."

He shook his head. "Didn't know. Told me she was all gospel."

"Well, you know now. You know, you must know—everything! And it is spoiling my life, so it is. After all, 'twas you married her. She'm yours."

The broad, vacant face shadowed. "Mine," he said in a sort of muttering voice. "Iss, sure, hers mine." The grindstone and Sarah—all he had.

Of late he had had a queer doubt as to whether Sarah were really his; but this little maid had reassured him. Sarah was his—Sarah as well as the grindstone.

For the first time he seemed to come to the surface, to see and recognize Gray. He made a gesture as if freeing his fingers from some sticky, adhesive substance. "You'll get Tom," he said slowly.

She waited.

"And me, I'll keep what's mine."

Grateful, yet a little awed, she left him. How he would manage it she could not guess, but she had faith, so much faith that, before long, she forgot her worries in hoping that Tom would be ploughing the field on the road to Shoppe. She had made and washed and ironed the frock she was wearing, and she would like him to see that pretty and clean things could come out of even such a home as hers. Besides, the blue of her frock and the blue of her eyes—

Silas went up the path. In his hand he held the silver of steel with which he had converted so many short-lived generations of pigs into pork. He

had fitted it with a short, wooden haft, and when he went pig-killing, he carried it concealed in his palm. The animal, bound to the killing-stool, could not see the knife, did not know what was about to happen. A prick ! Silas knew the exact spot—the jugular—for that prick which would let out the hot blood, send it frothing into the ready bowl.

The pig knew only the oncoming drowsiness that was death.

Death !

Sarah Olivey had filled the copper, had lighted the fire under it. When you killed a pig you wanted plenty of boiling water with which to scald off the outer skin. She stirred about, getting ready the barrel for the salting, bringing out the bowls and the old killing-stool. She had not meant to have the pig killed this week-end, but so well now as later ; besides—

As soon as pig's house was empty, Helyar would fill it for her ; and he had a nice lot of little veeres, so he had. She would pick a pig—last time he had given her a sow, but nowadays she got what she wanted. She liked Helyar fine, and as for him, he was fair, maazed about her.

For a moment she stood dreaming ; then, “ Ready, old Silly Billy ? ”

“ Me ? I don't keep no one waiting.”

She had still to push a bit more stick into the copper fire, and he leaned against the jamb of the door, watching her, waiting for her.

Twenty years since he had brought her to Pleasant Springs. He had dim memories of summer weather ;

of walking by the sea, Sundays ; of tilling his bit of garden. Good memories, but behind them something dark—dark as carrion meat—something that tainted the good memories.

He was worried about that dark something. It was that, not Sarah, that had driven him from his home and village, that had sent him to dry, stony places out of sound of the sea. The sea ! When he heard the welcoming voice on his return, gladness rose in his heart like sweet water in a well. It was the sea that made St. Ryn home. If only he could always have the sound of it in his ears when he lay down at night ; if he could wake to its rough shouting. It called him across England to the rim of hills beyond which it lay, and he knew that some day he would go down to it and it would give him peace.

That was the thing he wanted—peace ; he was suffering, and he did not understand why. He was restless. During the summer, while he had been plodding up one street and along another, he had been aware of an urge. He was to do something—

The need to do it lay at the back of his mind, just out of sight. When he tried to get a look at it, it was not there. But it interfered with his sleep. At night he no longer lay watching the stars rise until his eyes closed ; instead he lay watching until they paled before the yellowing dawn. He wished he could rid himself of this wrothering thing. He had always been a quiet, placid sort of chap ; but now—

It was a devil, sitting in a corner of his mind and whispering to him, pushing him.

Sarah came towards him, a tall, smiling woman with very red lips and a full figure. Silas did not move, only straightened himself.

"Give I a kiss, Sarah."

She laughed good-humouredly. "'Tis years since I done that." She had given her easy kisses here and there ; but never since he learnt how easy they were had Silas asked for one.

He put his hand on her shoulders, and she felt something hard in the right. "What you got there ? "

"'Tis only my pig-knife," and he turned her face to his. "Had your first kiss, I did."

She mocked him lightly. "Not you. Why, I was eighteen when I married—and for a good enough reason ! I'd had a pretty many before then."

"You told me—"

"Maid will say anything when she is in trouble."

For a moment he seemed dumbfounded, then his hands slid up a little, closing. "Didn't have your first, didn't I ? " The scar between his eyes was a vivid red, and the eyes were no longer round and placable. Something, sinister yet agonized, looked out of them. "At least, then, I'll have your last," and with that kiss his twisting hand pushed home the knife.

For a moment she stood, a look of wild surprise on her face, but as the blood spurted, she slipped forward, her legs giving.

Silas swerved aside, and she fell, in a crumpled heap, across the threshold. The man's face changed till it was once more bland and vacant. He had killed the pig that gleaned in Helyar's field ; and he was free to go.

Stepping over the body, he went down the path and grasped the handles of the wheel-cart. Behind him lay the hills over which he must pass if he would seek the safety of the big towns. But Silas was tired of pavements and houses and the passing of people. He went, not uphill, but down towards the sea.

THE CRUST

THE CRUST

I

ROGER stood with his back to the room, his eyes fixed on the snow, brown in patches, that covered the garden, that lay along the leafless branches, that turned the distance into black-lace mist. He did not see it, for he was thinking of the woman behind him in the room, thinking with an irritation so keen it blinded him.

Before Mrs. Lory, among the grey Japanese cups, lay untidily a heap of newspaper cuttings. They had come by the afternoon post, and she had kept them till his return from business, unopened. The first reviews of her new book—she wanted to share them with him.

At first Roger had been his sympathetic self. In the warm intimacy of the fire, of the growing dusk, they had read the long appreciative slips. Her brilliancy, that of a still pool which reflected light, appealed to the critics. Only one had demurred, and in declaring that Mrs. Lory, in *Gilt Edges*, had not drawn average men and women, had pricked her vanity. She had turned to Roger for his dictum, and Roger had proved unexpectedly difficult.

How could people like themselves know ?

“ You do not give me credit, then, for imagination ? ”

Although he had given in at once, she had felt he was more polite than convinced ; and because his admiration was a prop to her, she had gone on talking, had plunged. “ Because we have not chosen—”

Roger had got up suddenly, had walked to the window, staring not at the bluish whiteness, but at the winter of his hopes and dreams. Ordinary men and women, an—ordinary—man—

His withdrawal, showing they were no longer in the absolute accord on which by degrees she had learned to rest her spirit, troubled Mrs. Lory. She had come through long avenues of thought to the verge of a new book, meant to begin the rough writing of it that very evening. It was the story of a man, a man out of the ordinary, a genius, who was driven from his home by the everyday disturbances of life. He would wander in an interesting way, and in the end would find peace with a beloved—that peace of which he stood in need. She was not yet sure whether the beloved were human or divine, but she saw the book as a story which would appeal to the overwrought millions. To write it, however, she, too, must be in harmony with her surroundings. No, no, not she but they . . .

Her need drove her. “ We think alike,” and her voice did not question. Perfect agreement existed between husband and wife.

Roger’s emotions were always in full flood behind the gate of his lips. They choked his utterance

till what dribbled over was the feeblest trickle. "One gets older," he said, "one does not always think the same."

When he spoke in that queer half-stifled voice, Mrs. Lory knew he was in one of his moods. When the man was difficult, however, the woman—marriage being a permanent state—could afford to be patient. "Yes," she said brightly, "we get older. To think we have been married ten years!"

That should make him remember that the answer to "shall we or shall we not?" had been mutual; make him realize that he could not question a ten-year-old decision.

"Ten years?" he thought to himself. "Only ten years—there is still time."

In the past his view of the risks attendant on child-bearing had made him feel he could not ask any woman to face them—for his sake. No, he could not ask, but he had been told that if a woman loved her husband she would long to bear him a child. He was sure that Marion loved him, he had a husband's proofs, and yet—

When they married she had told him she did not wish to have children, and he had smiled over his knowledge that this would pass. After a year or two he found himself anxiously looking for a sign, analysing the things she said, considering those matters in which she showed an interest. She talked, he found, of surface matters, and she was becoming obsessed—more and more as time passed—with her career. She took the writing of her novels with astonishing seriousness; and though

they were, he must admit, quite good, that story-telling could be made the end of a woman's existence, surprised as well as dismayed him. To put books in the place of children.

"I have been happy, Roger."

That ought to bring him across the room to her. She waited expectantly, but he stood as if he had not heard, staring out over the snow. How tiresome it was! She did not want to talk of things that did not, never should, concern them. Generally Roger followed her lead.

"You have had your own way," he was saying in his stifled voice. It stopped as if something were being dammed back, went on again. "After all, it is your affair."

"Yes, my affair," but it wouldn't do for him to grow dissatisfied. She got up and went to him. "My dear, this slushy thaw is bad for you. You aren't getting any exercise, and that always plays Old Harry with your liver. Why don't you go for a walk?"

She had passed her hand between his arm and side and he became conscious of her as the woman whose love did not bring satisfaction. He was always hungry and, in the depths of his being, angry; but this—Marion—was all he had or could have. It was unreasonable, therefore, to be angry, though not, perhaps, to be disappointed, for after all it was life that had disappointed him, that had held out a closed hand full of promise, a hand which, when he had prised it open, had proved to be empty. He roused himself. "You are right," he said.

"I want more exercise than I am having. I will go out."

In the doorway he remembered a custom which had always obtained between them. "Are you coming?"

She shook her head, a little appeased to find that he recognized his constant need of her companionship. "No," she smiled, "I am about to be delivered of a story," and she wondered that his steps, going away, should quicken. She stood listening for a moment, still slightly annoyed by his attitude, but longing to forget about it, to begin her work.

If she had had children she wouldn't have had so much time for writing, she would perhaps not have had any time at all, she might even not have wanted to write.

No life of her own at all.

She much preferred things as they were.

The room in which she wrote was on the opposite side of the landing. There when she "sported her oak" nobody, not even Roger, might disturb her. What she could not deny, however, were currents of air, keen draughts of thought. To-night, though Roger might not come in, his words were with her, little palpable ideas which would not be driven away, or dispersed, or even forgotten. He did not think people like themselves could know how the ordinary man and woman felt. That opinion of his seemed to invalidate her work, therefore he must change it. She could not hope to influence him while he was in this difficult mood, but later

he should acknowledge he had been mistaken. He must, lest the tiny doubt of her powers, like grit, should stop the smooth grinding of the machine.

It was absolutely necessary that she should be confident, convinced.

As she crossed the landing a sharp wind struck her cheek and she was not surprised to hear sounds in the hall—a young voice, deep and soft, a voice which was answering, not a maid, but—Roger.

“ Louise Bridges ! I wonder what she wants ? ” She leaned over the balustrade, an anxious pucker between the brows. She did not want to be interrupted, especially by Louise. The girl was very well in her way, but simple, old-fashioned.

“ I have come round to know if Mrs. Lory is going to the concert this evening ? Harry can’t come— ”

Marion Lory called from above. “ Sorry, dear child, but I want to work. ”

“ Oh, ” the voice dropped to a note of disappointment and Mrs. Lory felt momentarily pleased to think of herself as in demand even among quite young people. It was like seeing oneself in a kindly mirror.

Roger was also worked on by that note. “ Could you do with me as an escort ? ”

The little knit of perplexity gave place to Louise’s eager smile. “ Are you going ? ”

“ I could. ”

She clapped her hands. “ Oh, good ! How kind of you, Mr. Lory. Now mother will be quite happy about me. ”

In a pleased, expectant voice he called to his wife. "So long, Marion. Don't bother to keep dinner for me if I am late. I can have something cold," and presently she heard the door close behind them.

When she had pulled her deep chair to the hearth and was settled in it, writing-pad on knee, she found that she had forgotten her slight irritation of that afternoon, that her mind was dark and quiet. The closing of the door seemed to have left the house empty.

II

"Are you fond of music?"

"Not very, Mr. Lory." She sought in her candid mind for the reason. "It has such a—" she paused, unequal to the explanation—"such a disturbing effect."

He laughed to himself over her simplicity. "And you don't like being roused?" Her young face was like a piece of blank paper and she was holding back as if the page were not yet sized and smooth and ready. Yet she was engaged to be married.

The word 'roused' was troubling. "I don't know," she murmured, almost as if she were afraid of what the strange, powerful expression might imply. "I suppose so."

"Then why are you going to the concert?"

"I am not going for the music." She had shied away from the thoughts, hot and heavy, that his comment had aroused. "I want to hear Sylvia Loraine play." She wondered if she dare confide

in him. He was wise, old, experienced. "She—we met her at a dance the other night."

"Yes?"

"She danced with Harry, and afterwards—" her smile grew mysterious, but she did not continue. Her brown gaze had dropped to the pavement, been caught. "Oh, look!" She pointed with that little air of excitement which a find, a something unexpected that has been bestowed by beneficent powers, induces, and he saw a spot on the grey kerb—an old penny. He watched, expecting her to stoop for it, but her glance travelled about the street. Some grubby children were at play and she beckoned to the biggest, a boy in charge of a little brother.

"See what I have found," she called to him. Followed by others, with whom he had been playing at soldiers, he ran to her and, his quick face lighting up with the excitement she had experienced, picked up the treasure.

"Sweets?" said Louise gaily. The boy looked from one to the other of the two confectioners in the street, decided where he could get the most for his money, and with the smart earnestness of a fellow bent on important enterprise, set out for it. The other boys followed, the little chap who was still young enough to be round and chubby, running at their heels, and all crowded into the dark shop-opening. "They will buy 'choc-lit,'" Louise said, smilingly, and stood to watch.

Roger amused, was willing to linger. Street-urchins, but she was as keen as if they had been

her brothers ! Suddenly he saw her as more than a girl.

In a few minutes the boys came out of the shop, the biggest with the bag in his hand. He stopped to make the division, and the others closed about him, the baby staring up hopefully.

"She has only given us three bits ! "

A leader of men, his decision was prompt. "Mum said I wasn't to give Freddy no sweets as they make him sick," and handing a lump of nut chocolate to each boy, he put the last into his mouth.

At first the little one did not realize what had happened. He looked expectantly at the still deflated bag. "Me, too," he said, pointing. "Choc-lit for Freddy, too."

The other mouths were working, but their owners looked over the baby's head. He pulled at his brother in an anguish of fear. Could it be true ? Weren't they going to give him any ? He ran between them, turning from one to the other, and his voice rose.

"All gone," said the big boy callously, and Freddy, realizing the truth, slumped howling on to the step of the shop.

But it was a world in which miracles, alarming miracles, could happen. Louise picked up the sobbing baby and carried him, hushed in full roar by the awful fact that he was in the arms of a strange lady, into the shop. Roger, following, watched the slow return of smiles as the baby forgot his perilous position in looking at the wealth by which he was surrounded. When they returned, Freddy was

grasping in one hand a cake, and in the other a long sugar-stick, and Louise must see that he, and not his elder brother, had the benefit of them.

She and Mr. Lory were late for the concert. "It does not matter," she said, "for Miss Loraine does not come on for some time." As she spoke contrition smote her. "But perhaps you wanted to hear some of those we have missed?"

He had come for no personal reason, merely because he was at a loose end, and he was already glad he had obeyed the impulse of the moment; but though he meant to enjoy what he heard, he did not care how much or how little it was.

Sylvia Loraine was a violinist, and she played temperamental music, the music that catches the unmusical, even them, in a net of emotion. Roger, listening, wondered why Louise, if afraid of that which such music creates, should have come to the concert. Sitting sideways, he could see her face—of the peculiar fairness which suggests a natural slight dusting of powder. It was surprising that under such glinty pale hair, from such a skin, the eyes that looked across the hall should be brown, a soft bright brown, with a star in each. His glance dropped to her full breast and he saw again the grubby tearful face of Freddy. The Madonna, yes, the type men worshipped, and—and deserted and—and came back to.

Harry Bentinck was lucky. A good fellow, with all the luck in the world. The gloom which Louise's companionship had lifted for a moment, crept back like twilight, like the beginnings of night;

and against its darkness he saw episodes of his unhappy marriage, disappointments, a white smoke curling up from the flame of his heart-burnings, from the flame that was being fed with fresh fuel by Sylvia Loraine's music.

A sigh reached his ear. "I wanted to see her," Louise said, "because after that dance, she—she wrote to Harry."

The musician changed at the waving of that wand to a human being, a creature of like desires and disappointments with himself. It was a dark face, strong. No consideration would make her forgo what she wanted.

"He was flattered but he did not answer the letter, and after a day or two she called at his office." Louise looked up, the starry eyes full of puzzled concern. "She—she liked him as much as that!"

Roger longed to enlighten her. "It comes," he said, "it comes just like that."

She studied him, her face serious and intent. "Oh, surely not?"

"Don't you know?" he said.

Louise looked from him to the woman, creating emotion with sound, and tried, as she always did, to utter what she thought, what she believed. "Know? I—I don't seem to, not quite; but the music, it tells me . . ."

"What?"

"It makes me feel—" she looked dreamily away.

"Feel?"

"As if I were—oh, it is too absurd!"

"But—still?"

She struggled to find the words. "As if I were—as if I must give—give myself. Oh, I want something. It—it is as if I were in love with someone—any one—the man next to me."

"You should not have said that," he said quickly, and she came back to the everyday. She looked at him and smiled.

"Oh, but you are safe."

"Why should I be?"

"You are married."

"Being married, I am not a man?"

"Well, not in that sense."

Sylvia Loraine's disturbing music had been blown away by the next item on the programme, and Louise was hastily re-establishing herself among familiar surface emotions. On the revelation of the immediate past she had shut a door. Now she told herself that there was no door. "That sort of thing, it is soon over and people feel a bit ashamed and try to forget they have been so foolish. Miss Loraine, she will forget she was silly about Harry, she will forget him altogether."

In the safe darkness of his flesh-walled mind, Roger was thinking. "And I, shall I ever be able to forget? To forget—you?"

III

From the Town Hall, where heads were hot and feet cold, they emerged into the keen air of frost.

The roads rang like iron under the flood of people, and their breath was smoke on the still air. "If the frost will only last," Louise said, eagerly, "we shall have skating."

Having been born in the warm south-west, Lory, until he came to this northern town, had known nothing of ice and snow. Interested, the girl questioned him and he found that he could talk to her. Insensibly the talk deepened.

"I did not want to go into business. My mother's brothers were both sailors and I longed to go to sea."

She could not bear that any should suffer frustration. "Oh—why didn't you?"

"I—well, I did. I ran away from school, got as far as the London Docks and then my father—you see, I was an only son—he came after me." He paused, seeing again the room in the little hostel, his father on the other side of the table, felt the other man's need opposed to his. She saw with pity that he trembled.

"My father was not strong, and he needed help in his business—the sort of help a son gives."

"And you went back?" She ought to have been glad that he had put his father's wishes before his own; but she was sorry, in some way disappointed. If he had held out she would have blamed him, yet have felt satisfied.

"If I had refused, the business he had spent his life building up would have gone to pieces. I could not let that happen."

He had sacrificed himself and it was fine, noble;

yet she felt the business was his father's affair, not his, that the old man had had no right to ask this of his boy. It had meant—what? She sought vainly for the word, the sense of which was in her mind.

"But later," she said eagerly, "you could have gone—later?"

"Things don't fall out like that. You make your choice and you abide by it. If he had not caught me up—"

"You don't like your work at the factory—" She had grasped what torture the being shut, day after day, in a walled place must be to one who craved the open spaces, the strangeness of the sea.

"I—" But he could not tell even her how hateful it was.

She saw the factory as a cage. Birds had been given wings, wings to carry them across the world. If cage doors could but be opened and all birds released.

"Can't you give up the business? Haven't you—?"

"I have about three hundred a year. I make two thousand and we live up to that."

"Three hundred?" she said dreamily. "Why it is enough to begin on—to begin a new sort of life."

"Yes, but my wife would not like to make a change."

Louise, having forgotten Mrs. Lory, was for the moment dumbfounded. Of course, yes, he had a wife. He, this man who was talking out of a long

bitterness, he stood in some relation, some very intimate relation, to the woman who wrote novels. Louise saw him as Mrs. Lory's husband and it put him suddenly a long way away. It was almost as if he had crossed the road and they were speaking to one another with the river of it between.

"Her books—" she said quickly, in order that he should not notice the change.

He was engrossed in his talk. "Her novels do not pay very well—enough for her personal expenses, but no more." He shook his head. "I could not ask her to live in a way to which she is not accustomed."

Even if he did, Louise was certain Mrs. Lory would not consent. She wondered pitifully—his father first, then his wife!

At the gate of Garden Lodge they parted. Louise had asked him to a homely supper but, having ascertained that Harry Bentinck would be waiting for her, Lory had refused. "Two is company," he had said, the upper lip lifting a little over his teeth. For once he, too, he had had company. It should make him resigned to the walk home; to the walk and to the opening of a door. He had been fed and should be happy and satisfied.

IV

By common consent the morning-room was left to the lovers and Harry Bentinck shut the door of it on himself and Louise. After a long tiring day

he would have a recuperative half-hour. "We won't light the gas," he said, and pulling the arm-chair—shabby as the rest of the room—nearer to the log-fire, drew her on to his knee. It was a roomy chair and she leaned against Harry with her forehead touching his chin and her gaze on translucent flame and grey ash, but she did not see that at which she looked.

Perfunctorily he asked about the concert, not interested in it, but wishing to hear her talk. Her voice, so curiously deep and soft, was his music. He wanted to hear its soft melody, so like that of the water in the beck by the door, a song that brings sleep and pleasant dreams.

"Mr. Lory was kind enough to go with me, Harry. The poor fellow, he does not seem to get much out of life." She narrated to this tried friend the story, talked round the character of Mrs. Lory.

"She is all right," Harry said indifferently, then struck the nail on its head—"what there is of her."

Louise could not see that he had struck the nail into place. Mrs. Lory was a novelist, a person of proved importance.

"She does not matter," Harry said.

But Louise saw that the cold hard flaming woman mattered because of the demands she made on others. In any real sense, no. "He—he is so different."

"Yes, there is power behind those eyes of his, some sort of power, but—"

She related the story of his attempt to escape. "That father of his, weak and selfish. Spoiled the

boy's prospects, for the business was in a bad way. Yes, then. Not worth while trying to bolster it up."

"He didn't know that."

"Thomson and Giles took it over in the end, and that is how he came to be manager of the factory here."

She was looking through the flames, was seeing a man who, when he took a holiday, went inland. "It isn't the things that are worth while that matter," she said dreamily. "It's—it's whether you put yourself first or—others. To sacrifice yourself, that—that's noble."

"Is it, my dear? Well, perhaps—sometimes."

He did not want to talk of Lory, whom he looked on as a good enough chap, but weak. It was warm in the fire-lit room, and he was tired. After the many activities of his day he was enjoying the quiet, the rest, the soft weight against his body. That afternoon he had been offered a well-paid post in Warsaw, and if he accepted they could be married sooner than they had hoped.

He told her of the offer, explained the possibilities.

"But," she demurred softly, "I should not like to live in Warsaw."

"Why?"

"I've heard that that part of the world isn't healthy for English children." She moved her head persuasively, burrowing into his shoulder. "Harry, I don't mind being poor and working hard and managing; but Mrs. Clintock lost her baby, if you

remember, when she was at Lodz. Heart-sorrows, oh, anything rather than that."

"Even drudgery—such as your mother has had?"

"Mother is happy."

"If that is the way you look at it, why shouldn't we be married at once?"

Yesterday she might have consented. To marry a poor man and work hard all her days had been the future to which she had looked forward. Here was the man and she had agreed to marry him. Why not at once? She hid a new unwillingness behind old decisions. "Father said next summer, and we agreed."

"Ah, but I want you, Loo . . . want you badly. I want to come home to you. I want to have at the back of my mind all day, the fact that you are in my house. Whenever I have a spare moment I want to go back to that and rest my soul on it and suck the sweetness out of it. You can't imagine how much better I shall work when I have got you."

She shifted her head from the hollow of his shoulder. "Oh, Harry, how dear of you." But she did not offer to marry him any the sooner because of his dearness.

V

The frost deepened until the Monks' Pools were fit to bear the townspeople. Swaying, swinging figures broke the quiet of the grey tree-rimmed lagoons of ice. At night, fires were lighted on the

verge, and fed with autumn logs and covered with turf through which the flames broke, leaping into the night, vanishing.

In the afternoon ladies skated, practising. In the evenings everybody, old and young, gathered at the Pools. After the office had set him free, Harry Bentinck brought Louise, even Mrs. Lory left her new story to accompany Roger. The two couples kept apart, each, it seemed, preferring to skate with the chosen companion. The Lorys skated in silence, living in different worlds, parted by the walls of the flesh. She was enjoying herself. Her mind, ruminating the scenes of the book, worked in a rhythm made by the swift movement. It would be the best book she had written, the story of an artist who gradually withdrew himself from the irritations of life, and by so doing found a freedom in which to make more and more beautiful things. The public would hail it as mystical. Roger, with whom she had discussed her view of art, agreed with her that the best did not come from the hurly-burly but from the dedicated life. Smelting fires for the common metals, but creation was super-normal. She believed it due to inspiration.

"If we had had children," she said, "how could I have written my books?"

He was silent, knowing that he no longer wanted her to bear him children; and his silence showed her he knew her argument was unanswerable. Anybody could have children, but no one else could have written her books. Art—

"I feel like Mr. Toad to-day," she said one evening,

as they sat by the fire, having their skates put on.

"Mr. Toad?" said Louise, evidently ignorant.

"Do you mean to tell me you haven't read *The Wind in the Willows*?"

"I can't remember—"

"Oh, then you must. I'll lend it to you."

"Thanks so much; I'll call for it next time I pass."

"It shall be put out in readiness for you; but to go back to Mr. Toad. He is the incarnation of our little weaknesses, and to-night I am feeling cock-a-hoop, because the Old Woman's Club has asked me to be the Guest of Honour at their next literary dinner."

"You will go up to town for it? How jolly for you!"

The frost kept everybody happily busy for a week, but when a thaw set in, Louise recalled the offer of the book. She would fetch it as she passed on her way to get a basket of fir-cones from the woods. She did not often go to The Gables and, as she set back the gate, she saw it with eyes to which a fresh knowledge of the owner had given clearer sight. The drive rounded from one gate to the other in a gravelled arc, the house standing bluff and square at the apex—a solid English home; and she saw it as set, resolute, an object in itself. It stood for something hard, something that was immovable and against which the tides of the winds, of the storms, broke in vain.

Walking between heaps of melting blackened snow

she came to immaculate steps, steps that no child, no animal, was there to sully. On each side of the door were wide windows, shining with cleanliness and edged with rich material. She compared the knob on the door with that of her home, a knob which was polished once in a while, when someone had time to spare from the cooking for so many hungry children, the washing-up and the large quick cleanings. No time in that shabby place for niceties. But these people—two thousand a year to spend on themselves; to spend, not in a jolly sort of a way, but in the perfecting of the dead interior and exterior of a house. “Whose god is their—”

Waiting for the sound of steps in the hall, Louise looked back. Out of this door, along this gravelled walk, Roger Lory went every day to the work he hated. She thought of him with an immense pity. Why did people do what gave them no more pleasure than eating sawdust would have done? To do work that was not only tasteless, but sickening, when other work, work they would have enjoyed, called to them? It was to her incomprehensible. Even drastic adventure would be better than this plodding along a dull uninteresting road, than this carrying of a resentful heart.

She rang again, and at length a servant opened the door.

“Is Mrs. Lory in?” But she had known from the woman’s dilatoriness that she could not be.

Mrs. Lory had gone to town for the dinner at the Old Woman’s Club.

"She promised to leave a book for me."

The maid did not know of any book, but Mr. Lory was in, should she—

"I could not think of troubling him. I will call again for it."

Roger, in restless mood, had had his attention caught by the sounds at the door. "What is it, Alice?" Looking past the woman, he saw the object of his disturbing thoughts. At once he stepped forward, afraid lest she might be a phantasy, might vanish. "You, Miss Bridges?"

"Mrs. Lory said I might borrow *The Wind in the Willows*."

His voice had lost its effect of trickling over an edge, it was clear and full. "Come in while I find it for you."

He led her into the library, a plain room, comfortable and lined with the backs of old brown books, his room. "It should be on this shelf. Sit down a moment."

As she crossed the warm-coloured carpet to the chesterfield, she looked eagerly at the room, taking in the details. This was his shell. Under the green lamp stood his writing-table, on a contrivance fixed to his chair were a tobacco jar, a box of cigarettes, a tiny gilt tray. The room seemed to her lined not with books but with thoughts, his hopes and his ideas. Somewhere, not far off—perhaps in the big cupboard which cut off the corner between the west and south windows—would be an untidiness of guns and boots and fishing-tackle.

Conscious only that Louise was in the room with

him, Roger mechanically took the book from its place and brought it to her. During the past week he had watched her on the ice, been conscious of her weaving in and out of the skaters, but he had not gone to her.

He laid the book in her lap and sat down beside her. It was not possible for him to remain at a distance. The waves of blood sweeping up made him forget everything but her nearness and his need.

Louise felt dimly surprised that, in a room which contained at least three comfortable chairs, he should have chosen to sit at her side. She innocently supposed that he must want to point out passages that had pleased him in the book. Moving along the couch to give him room, she glanced up with friendly smile and saw his face, saw that it had changed incomprehensibly. Not—incomprehensibly. A thrill ran down her spine. A warm confusion overwhelmed her. He was leaning towards her and she found that she could no longer move away. In her breast was that new understanding. It only deepened when his arm went round her, closing her to him. It was as if a spell had been cast on her, holding her there—incredulous, helpless.

"I—I must kiss you," he said, in an agony of fear lest her moving along the couch had meant that her blood was not answering the call of his.

But Louise, sitting motionless, gazed into his face and their lips came together. He gave her a lover's kiss and when he took his lips from hers she

sighed, sending out a soft breath, a breath of content.

“ You are not angry ? ”

In the confusion of a mind too shaken by passion to function coolly, she sought an answer. Angry ? This that she felt had nothing to do with anger—anger to her being annoyance.

“ You love me ? ” he said, in that new clear voice.

Her mind caught at the word. Love ? It did not make the matter clear, for she loved—Harry. Yes, indeed, yet in some strange way she belonged—that was it—*belonged* to the man beside her.

She did not want to think about it. A tide was carrying her along and she abandoned herself.

He was kissing her neck, her throat ; and she wanted that he should slake this new thirst of his—of hers. His face has suddenly grown in beauty for her. She adored him, humbly, cravingly.

It was imperative that he should kiss her.

And yet—

From the dimness beyond his kisses the generations whispered. Through her delirium came their whispers, warning voices that were thin and ghostly. She, too, whispered. “ I mustn’t,” she said.

VI

After a sleepless night Louise went to her mother. “ Aunt Winnie has asked me to stay at Combe Withers, and now that school has begun, perhaps you could spare me ? ”

"For how long, dear?" Louise, her eldest child, was very useful in the shabby, overflowing home.

"About a fortnight."

"You look as if you needed a change." Her sister Winnie had married a well-to-do business man and had several children, a little older than her own. She would tell Winnie to look after Louise a bit. "Yes, my dear, I can spare you, and you deserve a holiday."

Louise went to her packing. "If I go away, I shall be able to understand what has happened to me. This excitement, it is absurd to call it love. I *love* Harry, my dear, dear Harry."

Yet when she saw Harry coming down the road, she went out quietly by the back door; and when he wrote to ask if he could see her, she left his letter unanswered for a day or two, then wrote hurriedly of a bazaar and other things that had occupied her time, but omitted to say she was going to Combe Withers.

From her aunt's house she wrote, telling him honestly that she had gone away to do some thinking. "I shall be going out with Claudia and Effie a good deal, and I mean this to be a good change. I shan't write any letters."

She did not write any, neither did she read those she received. Harry's she burnt, the others she looked at but did not open. She not only looked at them but put them under her pillow at night and slept with her hand touching their smooth surfaces.

In the big houseful of jolly people, Louise was only another girl. She had always been friendly with her cousin Effie, but on this visit found herself drawn towards Claudia, who was older, and rather like her name. To the unexpressed annoyance of her parents she had lately become engaged to a middle-aged widower who was badly off. It seemed an extraordinary choice for her, so blithe, so handsome, so many years the younger, to have made. During the evening after Louise's arrival, he came to see his betrothed, and Louise, after a cursory glance at him, studied her cousin. Why had Claudia accepted him ?

The dark, rather sombre face had been bent over delicate trousseau embroidery, and when she raised her head she was still grave. Ah, but transfigured, grave with a joy too great for light expression.

Though Louise understood, she would not believe. A day later, some chance adjustment of the family kaleidoscope gave her Claudia as sole companion for a walk.

She seized the opportunity. "Will you forgive me if I ask you something ?"

The other came out of the rich and quiet dream in which, a little remotely, she lived. "What is worrying you, Louise ?"

"I was thinking about you."

The dark woman smiled. "Go on—"

"Why are you going to marry Mr. Conyngham ?"

"I am not very young, and it is time I married."

Louise, though a simple sort of maid, knew that so attractive a creature did not, never would, want

for admirers. "You could have married—oh, many times. You'll always be able to. Well, then, why Mr. Conyngham?"

Claudia hung uncertain for a moment. "Because I can't help myself," she said at last.

The other girl's eyes prayed her to be explicit. They were so full of personal trouble that Claudia yielded as she would not have done to either curiosity or kindness. "I have tried for four years, but I—for goodness' sake don't tell Effie or she will think I am mad—I can't go on living without Jim."

"Ah!" Louise nodded. She knew what the torture of living, of going on day after day, rising up to the long hours, lying down to the unendurable longing, might be.

"You understand," Claudia said, and her voice thrilled, shaking out emotion. "Lucky you!"

"Lucky?" murmured poor Louise.

"Try to think what life would be like without the man for whom you feel—like that. For four years, because I did not want to marry badly, because I am so fond of luxury and all the heavenly things money gives one, I pushed Jim away. I thought I was strong enough to do it, that the other things were more worth while. But—" she sighed a happy sigh, "I've given in. I don't care that my people are disappointed, that I shall live in a small way and be always doing without what I want. I—oh," she made a care-free gesture, "I don't care about anything in the world."

They went on in a silence rich with emotion.

Presently Louise broke it. Her voice was choked. "But—but it is terrible—it makes you—helpless."

The other nodded. She was proud to have yielded.

"Can it—last?"

"I don't believe that matters. Jim and I—we shall settle into a sort of steady content. We'll have had our time of—I can't put it into words, but I feel it will satisfy me in a sort of fundamental way. There are happy marriages, you know—for instance, dad and mother. She gave up a lot to marry him, and he is the only thing she has ever cared about. As for him,—it was like it is with me and Jim, and he is still happy."

"But surely," cried poor Louise, "most people do not"—she gave in, she uttered humbly the tremendous word—"do not *love* as—as we do?"

"Perhaps not—no."

"They seem to get along all right, without this—this—"

"Ah, but if one is capable—"

"Yes," agreed the other, not as if she wished to, but as if she must.

A few days later, Claudia saw her cousin off on her return to Webham. "My congratulations to Harry," she said as the train began to move, and was astonished to see on the face at the window a look of fear.

"My God—then it isn't Harry!"

VII

On his way home from the factory Roger Lory passed the gate of Garden Lodge. He went out of his way to do so, as he had gone out of his way to post his letters to Louise at the chief post-office in Webham.

Having learnt she was at Combe Withers he had not been able to resist the temptation to write. Louise did not answer. Nevertheless he continued, because he could not help himself, to pour out his love. Even to put it on paper helped him. It was a faint satisfaction—a relief.

Every evening, passing the house, he looked up, hoping that the window that he thought was hers would disclose her ; and every evening after dinner he went to his room, that room. She was still in it. The air vibrated with her silent voice. She sat before him with her face of a lover, and he wrote. When he had set down what had been simmering in his mind all day, he walked back to the town and posted it. It had to catch the next, the very next post. It must go flying through the dark world that night and be put into her hands when she awoke. Through the night he would lie thinking of those passionate pleas which were flying across the sleeping country, getting nearer to her with every moment that passed. Already fresh words that must be said, were rising through his mind like a run of silver bubbles ; but the ones he had already put into written form would reach her

first. While she was reading them, thinking them over, perhaps—ah—perhaps loving them, he would be catching in the net of his ink and paper this new uprush.

For a fortnight the casement window of her room had remained shut, but on a mild February evening he saw, as he came round the corner, that half had been opened. She was home, then, perhaps only a few feet away. He stopped as if it were impossible for him to go on, to walk away. The front door opened and Louise came out, a letter in her hand.

It seemed to him that his joy was too great, that he would fall dead at her feet. Then he was standing with her ungloved hand in his, was looking deep into her eyes—and he read the tremendous truth.

Louise moved on and he went as if moved by some inner mechanism, pacing beside her till they reached the red postbox. Before putting the letter into the oblong opening, she showed him the superscription and he saw the name was Bentinck. "I have written to tell Harry I cannot marry him."

The sound of the letter falling into the empty box, falling on to what gave back a sound, hollow and final, reached his ears. "Of course," he said, aware of events marching, of himself being carried along—"yes, you had to tell him."

She resumed her walk, past the remaining houses, along a road between fields, and he followed her. They came at last to a stile, and he helped her over. Beyond it lay a path that wound among trees.

The trees would wall them from the eyes of the world. Within it they would stand together and decide, not what they must do, but how they should do it.

VIII

They were sitting on the bole of a tree, a tree which had been stripped of its branches and left.

"With your capital," Louise was saying, "you could buy a steamer and trade goods, and we could go to islands out of the ordinary trade routes and sell the cargo and buy more."

He was amazed and delighted. "But—but I have not passed the necessary exams."

"Until you did, you would have to be the super-cargo; but you would pass them."

"Oh, I should." His tone was fervent, he saw those seas, blue and grey and green, saw the islands, the brown peoples, the sunshine.

"Then, if you piled up the boat anywhere"—not without taking note had Louise read all the books of adventure—especially South Seas adventure, which she could procure—"we should have to stop there and grow cocoanuts."

He saw her as wise and provident, but had his doubts. "Won't it be a hard life for you?"

"Hard? Oh, Roger, I have never had any money or—or what people call comfort and I don't seem to want it. As long as there is food, and it is warm, and you are there—"

He saw that little steamer—his; the thing he had longed for all his life. It seemed as if she were giving it. She had cupped her hands, those overflowing hands. She held them out to him.

“Let us go at once,” he cried, in sudden fear.

IX

Marion Lory had come to the bleak middle of her book. The chapters in which she was chronicling the tiny domestic disturbances which, piling up, made life impossible for her artist, seemed to her lacking in dramatic event. They were dreary when they might have been cataclysmic. Unsatisfied, she tinkered at the sentences, the paragraphs. At the back of her mind lay the fear lest she might have to destroy a chapter—more than one. She was dissatisfied, could not feel she had done her best. In her absorption she forgot Roger. He was there, he would always be there, and when the chapters were ready for reading aloud, she could call him to her side. He made an appreciative listener. She did not want criticism, only that he should understand the mood, the experience, which was expressing itself in her book.

She worked on a typewriter, watching the letters form themselves in a sort of print before her eyes. The shaped word was a help and she liked the orderliness of the straight lines, the clear letters, the spaces. Beyond the typewriter on a wall-shelf were the books she had already written, the English edition, the American, the little red volume Nelson

had issued cheaply. The books were blue and brown and a dull yellow. Why had she not insisted on having them bound alike? Some day she would have a uniform edition—perhaps a pale rose with her signature in gold imitation writing running across the front cover—her signature, the impress of her personality on its generation. She looked from the row of accomplished books to the sheet of paper, unsatisfactory, irritating, that faced her on the machine. The sentences she had written did not please, she admitted to herself that they had no bite, that they were dull. In a rush of disgust she caught up the lid of the machine, fitted it on. She would write no more until she had found the solution of her difficulties. Getting up, she went idly, vagrantly, from the room.

As she crossed the landing, she noticed a line of light under the door of Roger's room. The maid, when preparing the bedrooms for the night, must have forgotten to turn it down. Tch! Tch! How careless these girls were. Mrs. Lory would speak to her in the morning, but meanwhile would see to it herself.

She opened the door. After the low light of the landing she was struck by the brightness, then by a certain dishevelled appearance, furniture pushed about and littered with unusual objects, of the room. It was a second before she saw in the midst of this untidiness the moving figure of her husband. She had come in so quietly that he, having his back towards the door, did not realize that she was in the room.

What was he doing? Before him on the table was an open suitcase and she saw socks and collars, clear, white and black, lying beside it. He was folding something—a coat. She stared, at first in utter surprise, then her surprise was shot with fear. Indubitably he was packing.

He had said nothing to her about a journey!

He reached for his cheque-book, half-turned, and the edge of the open door caught his notice. Uttering an exclamation of annoyance, he moved to shut it, and perceived his wife.

If she had had any doubts his face resolved them. For a moment, looking into his eyes she saw the soul of him, that soul which for years had been longing to escape. "What—what are you doing, Roger?"

He stood between her and the litter of personal belongings. It was as if he would have kept her from looking at them, not in order to conceal them, but because of what they meant.

Not often could Roger utter his mind, but that night the love of Louise had given him power. "I am going away."

Her mind was swept by sudden anger. "Alone?"

He did not answer. In his mind was the feeling that he must not utter the name, to him sacred, the name of his woman; and yet—why not tell the truth? Marion would find out.

"Ah, I see," she said bitterly, "not alone."

His voice was the old feeble dribble of sound. "I am going with Louise Bridges."

The blood rushed to Mrs. Lory's face, with a flood of words. But she mustn't, she mustn't.

If she were not careful, very careful, he would get away, escape. Louise Bridges, that serpent of a girl, was her rival! She could have laughed as rudely, as loudly, as a market-woman, but she must not, no. That Roger—oh, incredible! It had been going on under her eyes and she had not known, had had no suspicion. Roger, while he had been planning this wickedness, had shown her a smooth face, a sympathetic mind. But men were like that. They had strange aberrations, and while the spring-fever lasted were hardly accountable for their actions. They broke up homes, did irreparable damage. It was for those in charge of them, their women-kind, to prevent them, draw them back to sanity. The madness passed, and once they were cured of it, they forgot it had ever been.

Mrs. Lory smothered her personal distress. "My poor Roger," she said, "have you got it as badly as all that?"

He stammered. "I—I love her. You must divorce me."

Her presence filled the doorway through which he must pass. "Roger,—I am your *wife*."

That to begin with.

Delay was the important matter. If she could prevent his going that night, he would not go at all.

She must prevent him. He could not be allowed to do this vile thing. He must be saved from himself, from the dark forces that moved a man to do evil.

The time had come to overwhelm him with

words, to turn his flank. "You have seen this sort of thing happen to other people. You know the feeling does not last. It is the animal side of you, Roger, the side you have always tried to keep under control ; and it is not going to prevail. You have loved me too long for that. My dearest, a love that has lasted ten years cannot be blown out like a match. Under this little flare-up of passion lies our beautiful, our perfect affection."

Roger stared at her helplessly ; never would he be able to make her understand. In the half-stifled voice that dammed back the flood of his emotion he muttered that he must go ; and, forgetting the suitcase, the cheque-book, everything but his urgent need to place himself beyond her reach, he moved anxiously forward. "Don't try to keep me. I—I will write."

She smiled, she put her hand on his arm and, feeling him shrink, felt for the moment that she dared not speak. *Her* husband !

But never, never would she let him go.

"Not like this, my dear love. I could not bear to have you sneak out as if you were ashamed of what you were doing. Go if you must, but do so openly ; go in daylight."

For ten years she had been wife to him, caring for his comfort, faithful and loyal. Their two lives were united in the ideal marriage ; and yet, owing this ten-year happiness to her, he had planned to let her down, to sháme her in the eyes of Webham. The women, hitherto envious, would talk. "Have you heard—?" Oh, impossible to allow it.

That hussy down the road.

"You are all I have, Roger, but listen, if it is for your happiness I am willing to let you go. Why, of course I am, only you must be reasonable." She had controlled her anger to a harsh urgency. "We must come to an arrangement, behave like sensible people."

"Let me go *now* and you shall make what arrangements you like."

"I can't let you go like that." Her face had hardened, and suddenly he saw under her smoothness the virago who would stop at nothing. He was to have met Louise at the station, caught with her the ten o'clock train to London; but he realized that Marion would go to any lengths, follow him, insult Louise, make an impossible row.

Ah, he should not have come back for his clothes. They should have gone straight away. He had known that they should.

He stood before her, dumbfounded, flustered, and Marion seeing him half-routed, turned quickly and went out of the room. She must clinch the matter. Hurrying to the telephone in the hall she rang up the Bridges and was answered by Louise's mother. In a few hard words she related what had happened. "I leave you to talk to her . . . she has tried to wreck my home . . . her mother will be the right person."

Ringling off, she called up her father. Would he come round as she was in great trouble? Yes, and bring her brother.

She hung up the receiver, found Roger at her

elbow, heard his stammered, "How . . . how dare you—"

"I will do anything rather than let you break up our home, our happiness."

X

The two men were shut with Roger in the library, and Marion, after a few words in the rôle of loving, faithful, self-sacrificing—up to a point but not consenting to evil—wife, had withdrawn. She knew what her father and brother would say. "As many mistresses on the quiet as you like, but—a man draws the line at seducing a young girl." She did not approve. A man's view of life. . . . Horrible! horrible! . . . but she must let them say what they would. She knew that they would batter Roger with their code till they broke him down. She had no doubts. He would give in after a struggle. He always did.

He would be given back to her and—she would hate it.

Roger—her lips were a hard line across the middle-aged face. He had failed her, had tried to make her a thing of pity, the woman who had not enough charm to keep her man. Her pride was in the dust. That she—she of all women—should be so humiliated. Deserted—a deserted wife!

She found a relief in coarse and rough expression—"that Roger should have turned her down for a

bit of fluff who had given him the glad eye." She would never be able to forgive him, but—she would take him back.

XI

Roger had listened to the tale his father-in-law told, the tale of Marion's faithful devotion. He had admitted that rapture and ecstasy slipped into affection, and affection lasted, and that that was marriage. Amid the shifting sands of life you found that solid islet. It was all most men got—they were perhaps lucky to get that.

He had agreed that marriage was a social ordinance and that a man must not evade his responsibilities, that he owed it to society to conform to its rules.

Affection—a mild emotion, very mild. He supposed he had some sort of feeling for Marion, some sort of affectionate feeling. It was, of course, affectionate, it could not be anything else. He must not allow himself to think that he—

That would be too dreadful and—he pulled himself together—it was not true. A woman with as many excellencies as Marion had, no one could hate her. His feeling was of course affection, submerged at the moment, but there underneath and capable of new life. He admitted reluctantly that she had a claim. He had taken her from her home and family, made himself responsible for her future. A man must not slip out, and go off—

He does not when he is given time to remember and realize.

They — her father and brother — they said that having married Marion he must not abandon her. She had been faithful and loving. They struck that note heavily, pounded on it.

He must acknowledge that he had intended to wrong her. For his pleasure! To wrong that other too, the other of whom he thought with a shivering of the soul; of whom he dared not think.

They said she was too young to understand what it meant to be an outcast from the society to which she belonged. He, himself, being a man, would know how the world treated those who broke its rules. Once lost, her fair reputation could never be regained and—a woman's reputation, it was more to her than jewels, more perhaps than love itself.

He must have mercy on her youth.

The proof that he loved her would lie in his ability to give her up, in his refusing to let her sacrifice herself.

His responsibility and Marion's faithful wifehood, and the girl's ignorant youth.

They pounded away on those heavy chords, till under their hands something gave.

XII

The signalman said that level crossings were a mistake, especially if they were at a spot from which you could only see the train when it was close upon

you. Mr. Lory had started to cross the lines after the ten o'clock had been signalled and had paused to re-light his pipe, or something. When he saw the train he moved quickly but must have made a mistake as to which line the train was on. Or perhaps he slipped—Lee could not be quite sure, as the body of the advancing engine was between—"a mercy the poor chap was not killed."

Roger's accident gave him three weeks in bed. He came out of black stupors to find Marion moving about his room, taking a little part—not much, for she had her book to finish—a little part in the nursing. Otherwise there was a woman in a rustling dress and clackety shoes who did her work like a pleasant machine and then left him to himself. He liked being a case. It gave him liberty to think.

He woke one teatime to find Marion in the place of the nurse and he knew she was going to trouble him with talk of what had occurred. He drew himself together inside, determined to cover, to protect a certain rawness.

Marion leaned towards him and her voice was full of a pathetic reproach. "How could you have done it, Roger?"

He was unable, physically unable, to answer.

She shook her head as one pitying the foolishness of a beloved child. "In a year's time you will have forgotten her."

It might be, but he did not believe it possible, and oh, that year between! God—could he go on living?

"Our love—our ten-year-old love—you have hurt, maimed it, but—"

He wondered—did she love him? She believed she did, and he supposed she must, but did she in the depths of her? Even if he must grant that she did, her attitude would be that he had betrayed her trust. She would insist that he should be contrite, that he should make it up to her. He saw before him a stretch of arid years during which he was "making it up to her."

"This time next year you will have come to see it would have been a mistake. A deep affection such as you have for me—"

His politeness, his civility, his self-abnegation, it was thus she had interpreted them. A man sowed, but how astonishing was the plant that sprang up.

"A deep affection such as you have for me cannot be extinguished by a gust of—of—" She would not utter the indelicate word trembling on her tongue. No, for it would be lowering herself to utter it in connection with him, her husband.

"I know that men are weak creatures, but I had hoped that you—" Men were wanderers, but in the course of time they came home, and the wise woman forgave. "But you will pull yourself together and—someday it will be all right again." She could not forgive him all at once, that was too much to expect of her, but when he had proved himself contrite. . . . "You," her voice thrilled with self-pity, "you owe it to me to make me happy, Roger."

She left him to think over the pain he had caused her, he who would never willingly have hurt any sentient creature. She could rely on that tenderness of heart.

XIII

The news of the accident was brought to Garden Lodge by Harry Bentinck. He asked to see Louise, and she went to him in the morning-room.

"Poor chap," he said.

Louise, a white daunted Louise, leaned her head on the mantelshelf and the tears fell. "I left it to him," she said. "I should not have. They—he could not get away."

Bentinck understood—the story was as clear to him as a map, an outline with everything sharply marked. "He couldn't, he is that kind. Louise, I've come to-night to ask you something. I don't see how you can stop on here, almost next door to—er—them."

"What else can I do?" She had had a vague idea of getting some work, perhaps in London.

"When you chucked me, I accepted that Warsaw job. I'm going practically at once. Come out with me."

She shook her head. "I shan't be able to forget."

"I'm not asking you to."

"You are worth something better than a dead heart, Harry."

"If I am willing to marry a ghost, that is my concern."

The one was resolute and the other indifferent. Before Roger was back at the factory, they were married and gone. Louise had had a talk with her mother. "You won't forget, but there are different sorts of love and you will have a common interest—children."

The girl shrank. "Harry's children."

"In the end it does not so much matter who is the father as that you should have them about you. Children, they are the important thing."

Louise's wounds were as yet only filmed over with thin new skin. She sat in unhappy thought. "The letters, mother . . ."

"Burn them, my dear. Act as if he were dead. If you must think of him, think of him in a grave. He is dead to you."

"Shall I never see him again? Oh, how can I—how can I go on living?"

"My dear, you are strong and vital, and the little things of life are still left you. You are not the only woman to suffer for the weakness of a man. All in our time—"

XIV

Roger Lory had returned from the factory earlier than usual. He hung up coat and hat, dropped his stick with a rattle into the stand. He did not want to surprise Marion. When people are living on a crust under which their hearts beat in passionate disunion, in smothered flame and bitterness, it is

best to be wary. If the crust of small hypocrisies were to give and let them through it would be unfortunate.

"Poor Marion," he said to himself. She had been made unhappy by him and he must make it up to her. She believed the feeling he had for her was love, and he must keep up the delusion, be very careful not to let her even suspect the truth.

When he joined her in the drawing-room, she, knowing he was coming, would look up smiling, would welcome him home. He would have thrust his devils into the background and would respond affectionately—Lord, why had men troubled to invent a hell?

He pushed open the drawing-room door, recalling what he had to do, the routine. Marion, too. She looked up with the appropriate wifely smile and he went forward, he put his hand on her shoulder, leaned over and kissed her—oh, yes, affectionately. He said, "Well, darling, how has the writing gone to-day?"

He did it very well—considering.

THE VAMPIRE

THE VAMPIRE

I

“Is Mr. Cruikshanks in?”

“No, sir.” Because all the world loves a lover, and because Frazer was dark and romantic-looking, the little maid took pity on him. “But Mrs. Cruikshanks is.”

“Perhaps she would be able to tell me when he is expected home.”

He crossed the threshold, and his smile was eager and sincere. “I won’t keep her more than a moment.”

But Jennie, glad to think there was a chicken with new potatoes and asparagus for dinner, smiled to herself and, when she had shut him into the drawing-room, laid another place. Overhead Flora Cruikshanks, who, on hearing the click of the gate, had gone to the window to see—well, of course, to see if it were Billy, changed hurriedly into a satin gown.

When she came up to change for the evening she had been feeling bored and dull. Billy had said it was uncertain whether he would be back to dinner, and to one of her healthy social instincts a solitary was a wasted evening. Frazer’s advent had brought

back her sparkle. He had a way of looking at you that was exciting.

Simon Frazer, waiting, full of a nervous impatience, in the drawing-room, heard her moving about overhead, could almost see her. Washing his hands after tennis in Cruikshanks' dressing-room, he had caught a glimpse one day through the half-open door, of rose-lined chintz, of a girlish, lavender-scented room. He had thought of it as unsophisticated, wholesome, wholly young.

He could imagine her twisting up her curly mop, running to the wardrobe, pulling open the door with the big mirror, taking out a gown, shoes. Her clothes were never a bit smart, but when a woman is so beautiful. . . .

His throat went dry, and the excitement which he had been trying to keep under, began to rise, to run like fire through his body.

He could not go on like this—sleeping wretchedly, eating next to nothing, dreaming when he should have been working.

In spite of her five years of married life she was still so young, so immature, such a child. Her beauty set a match to fires from which, when they grew too warm, she fled, preserving her own coolness of heart. He could not believe she was a cold woman. . . .

He recalled the afternoon that they had watched her husband play singles with Powell, the man who lived next door. "It is difficult to think of you as married," he had said. "What is more, I don't

believe you feel any older than when you lived at home with your people."

Her face had clouded. It was true, what he said, and yet—no, not quite. Five years had passed, and everything, even her feeling for Billy, had become a little worn, a little dimmed. When she married him life had promised to be full of small interesting matters—love, babies, an increasing income; but the children had not come, and Billy said trade was bad and that she must not spend money. She was becoming frightened of the future—long years that might be empty. It was tiresome of Simon Frazer to remind her.

"Well played," she called across the court, as Billy neatly returned a ball.

"He is winning," Frazer said.

"Yes," she observed dispassionately, "but his form is not as good as it was last year." She gazed at Billy, watching him move about. She had always admired him, a squarely-built, curly Englishman. She had thought him handsome. Well, and he was. Why then did Frazer make him appear—not coarse, oh no, but—. Billy looked heavy, because he was putting on flesh, and that was because he did not take enough exercise, and that because he spent so many evenings in his office—at least, when she asked him, that was what he said he did.

She wondered unhappily over the change in Billy. He was no longer the cheery, jolly chap she had married. If he had not told her his business was going ahead, she might have thought he was worried.

Frazer was speaking. "I believe you look on your husband as a—well—a sort of brother." There was a curious note in the man's voice. It was as if he were jealous, not of, but for Billy.

"A brother? Oh, no, my brother Tom—" she checked, for she had been going to say that the brother she had lost, for whom she was still in slight mourning, had been the jolliest fellow in the world, while husbands . . .

Frazer's mind, in the uncanny way to which she was growing accustomed, had followed hers. "You were never in love with your husband."

"Oh, but I was, yes—tremendously!" Again she looked at Billy, wondering. "One does not marry," she said a little forlornly, "unless one is in love."

"You child, you babe. It is a profanation for anyone as ignorant to talk of love."

"Simon," she said reprovingly. He was so much a friend of the house that she had learnt to call him by his given name. "Simon, you should not treat me as if I were a child. I am a woman."

"My God," he had cried desperately, "I wish you were."

II

When she came into the drawing-room, which, although the blind was drawn against the sun, was full of mellow light, her appearance left him as usual breathless. The Lord God should not make women so fair.

"Billy was not sure he would be back to dinner," she said with her welcoming smile, "but you must stop on the chance." They kept up the fiction that it was Mr. Cruikshanks he came to see, and suddenly he felt that to do so was absurd.

"Floy," he said abruptly, "I hope he does not come."

The red ran up under that miraculous skin, and she frowned. "Oh, please." That was the worst of men. They always, in time, made love to you. Then, of course, you had to send them away.

Frazer was different from the others. She had not greatly cared whether they went or stayed, there were always more. More of the same kind.

Her eyes took in unwillingly that he was shaking. He felt, then, as strongly as all that? Strange, yes, and exciting, but—

"Floy, what is the good of this humbug? I come to see you."

They all came to see her, that of course; but it was the right thing to pretend that they came because they were friends of Billy. No harm in their coming as long as they—behaved.

"You know that since I saw you last I have been living for this moment."

She was not going to acknowledge that she did. To do so meant that she would have to tell him he must not come again. She felt angry. Why had he spoken? They had drifted happily, conscious both of undercurrents, enjoying the summer warmth, the—summer—

He saw, and in his usual way interpreted her

anger aright. "You don't suppose I wanted this? I'm the last chap in the world to get tangled up with another man's wife. I like things above-board, but there it is, I can't help myself." He looked as if he were accusing her. "I'd give anything never to have come here." His voice deepened. "No, I wouldn't, though. It has been hell, but—it is the most worth while thing that has ever happened to me."

She cried out, disturbed and unhappy. "Oh—you are spoiling things," she said, "and I don't want you to. We were quite happy as—as pals."

"We were never pals."

Again her heart acquiesced. True; but how had it come about? And—what did it portend? She felt suddenly afraid. "We can't be anything else," she said, setting her face stiffly, "I'm married."

The others, once they realized that she was not "that sort," had taken her decision as final, but to Frazer it was as if she had not spoken.

"Don't you care?"

His eyes searched her face, and she found it was all she could do to keep it from changing, yielding. If she would succeed, she must keep her attention fixed. And yet, the dark, glowing face so near her own. Ah—but she must not think of it as lovely and beloved; and, she must move—

Further away.

Her feet were heavy on the floor, her body was like lead.

Lead or—or flame ?

“No,” she said, making a tremendous effort.
“I—I don’t care.”

She was then able to draw a deep breath. Frazer must accept that—let her go.

Instead he leaned forward—though she was a tall woman he was several inches the taller—leaned over and laid a hand on her shoulder. “You do,” he said harshly.

That hand on her shoulder, its weight was intolerable! She could not think of anything but its warm pressure, of the streams of fire that were running through her, making her in some queer way different. She was shocked by this feeling, which was so much stronger than that which had carried her into matrimony when she was seventeen. “My—my husband,” she said, making of the word a shield, holding it between them.

But to Frazer, who long since had met and wrestled with this bugbear, the word had no longer the substance of actuality. “This is you and me,” he said, sweeping it aside. “Floy—” he bent towards her and again she experienced a surface impulse to move, a deep response. She must not let him—she could not help herself.

III

A kiss given in a moment of mutual emotion, while it clears away the mists, does not necessarily take two instinctive lovers the whole of the way.

Flora Cruikshanks was a practical, conscientious girl, the last person it might have been thought to let a romantic affair interfere with her simply ordered existence. The fact that her feeling for Frazer was strong, that it threatened her self-control, made her regard it as unhealthy, an obsession which, if she struggled against it, she must presently overcome. "If I don't see you again—" she said with drastic intent.

They were pretending to eat the chicken and asparagus, but neither knew what lay on the plates, each was eating in order that Jennie might not see how it was with them.

Frazer expounded his gospel, a new one, made, in fact, for the occasion. The urge of the fundamental emotions was sacred. Vows made in ignorance should not be considered binding. Because Floy loved him, she was his woman, and it would be wicked to remain with Cruikshanks. Flora listened to his pleading. She knew he was clever, much, much cleverer than she. When, however, it came to a matter of right and wrong, there was no need for cleverness. You knew, and that was all there was to it.

In her different way she was as strong as he, perhaps—for in all her healthy body she had not a single sick nerve—stronger. "You may be right," she said, "but I'm married, and that settles it—at least for me."

When dinner was over he asked her if she would walk with him to the station.

She had done it before, partly because she enjoyed

fresh air and exercise, partly, it must be admitted, from love of adventure. If she were seen by anybody who knew her, they would talk. It was fun doing things which would have outraged public opinion if they were known.

To-night, however, when she went to find a wrap, she was not thinking of superficialities.

This was the last time she would walk to the station with Simon.

Early marriages were a mistake. If she had not been in such a hurry. . . .

An empty nursery, a pre-occupied husband, nothing in particular to do, she did not wonder that women like herself took to bridge, or puppy-dogs, or drink.

All the jolly things over and done with—at twenty-two!

Frazer, waiting in the hall, saw the discontent in her face as she came down to him, and his heart leapt. He would win her, not by argument, but through love.

He was confident he could give her all she had missed.

IV

The field path skirted the meadows of the old Manor House and was set with elms, in the tops of which rooks since time immemorial had built. As Flora passed she heard the old birds murmur a little, talking to themselves, talking, perhaps, in their sleep.

"How easily they settle their affairs," she said with a sigh.

"Yes, each season. If the mate of last year did not prove satisfactory they make a change."

"You twist everything to suit yourself."

Where the path joined the quiet suburban road she stopped. "It's good-bye," she said. "I shan't see you again."

He heard the sob in her throat, the sob which contradicted the words. "But Cruikshanks has asked me to come down on Sunday."

She shook her head at him. "What is the use? It is only putting off the evil moment. I've got to push you out of my mind."

"But I said I would come."

"You have got to give me up."

"I've no excuse for not coming now."

"Well—"

"Oh, darling, thank you."

"This next Sunday, and then never any more."

"You can't mean that? You shouldn't be so cruel."

Though the tears stood in her eyes, her lips did not tremble. She was not cruel, she was only doing what she believed to be right.

V

Billy Cruikshanks caught a train before the one by which, when he dined in town, he usually travelled. He came to a house in which only the hall-light and one in the kitchen were burning.

Jennie, lost in an E. M. Dell story, lifted a glowing face when Mr. Cruikshanks asked where the mistress was. Not for the world would she have made mischief, but at the moment she was hardly her shrewd, kindly self. "I don't know, sir."

"Did she dine out?"

"No, sir."

"Was anyone here?"

"Only Mr. Frazer, sir."

Cruikshanks picked the word "only" out of the sentence. Frazer came as frequently as all that, did he? "When was he here last?"

Jennie's face lost its dazed expression. "He was here to tennis on Saturday, sir."

"Pshaw; I mean—" he paused. It would not do to say too much to the girl. "Is your mistress out?"

"Well, sir, she sometimes goes up to the Hall after dinner—" Mrs. Cruikshanks' parents lived at Stormfleet Hall, a large new house on the top of Eastham hill.

"She went out with Mr. Frazer?"

"I didn't notice, sir."

Cruikshanks betook himself to the small room on the left of the front door, his room, and sat down to wait. He had had a long and wearing day. A bigger firm was underselling him, and his natural instinct was to fight. He wanted to get at them and throttle them.

While he was struggling in the deep waters of business, Floy was amusing herself with other men—but he would soon put a stop to that.

When she drifted in out of the greyness, the man awaiting her saw with angry understanding that she was looking even handsomer than usual.

He came into the small square hall. "Seen him off?"

"Him?" said Flora, suddenly breathless. "Do you mean Mr. Frazer? He wanted to see you . . ."

"I can believe that."

"What is the matter, Billy? You would not say whether you would be home, and when Mr. Frazer turned up I kept him, thinking you might be in any moment."

Cruikshanks' face was flushed and scowling. Did she take him for a fool? "He has been here before," he said.

"Entirely your doing. You asked him to drop in whenever he had a free evening."

"Now look here"—his manner was unpleasant—"how often has he been down?"

Flora's courage was coming back. "How often? I am sure I don't know. You had better ask him."

He stood angry, but uncertain. His wife had turned to the hatstand, was hanging the rainbow-tinted scarf she had worn on one of the light wooden pegs. She glanced at herself in the long, narrow mirror. Secretly she was conscious of alarm. She had done nothing wrong, and yet she felt that Billy was justified.

And Cruikshanks, watching her, wanted to catch hold of her, shake the truth out of her. "Come,

out with it!" he said at last. "You have been carrying on with the fellow."

She turned slowly, gave him a contemptuous glance, and walked past into the drawing-room.

"I don't know what you mean, Billy," she said.

It was evident that he knew nothing for certain; besides, there was nothing to know, at least, not much. "You brought this man to the house, and because he was a journalist and could talk of your goods in papers, give you free advertisements, you asked me to be civil. You took him to Broadstairs with us—as part of the game. It was all your doing, not mine. If I had known you were jealous—"

She went to the switches and suddenly the room was filled with a subdued orange light, a sort of night sunshine.

Billy spoke less certainly. "Why did you not tell me when he came?"

"I thought I had." Her voice sounded indifferent. "Lately, of course—well, you know yourself I am generally asleep when you get back from town, while in the morning it is such a rush."

He was not quite satisfied. "Strange I did not meet you as I came down High Street."

"He went the field way. I did not go far."

"Humph!" The growl died in his throat.

She had no doubt been flirting with the fellow, amusing herself. He left her too much alone, but with his affairs in the state they were, how could he help it? At any rate he must make her understand that she was not free to carry on with any

Tom, Dick and Harry. "When is he coming again? Don't pretend you don't know."

"Why should I pretend? And I don't think you should speak to me in that way. I have not done anything I am ashamed of." Suddenly she remembered the kiss. Well, but she wasn't ashamed of it. She would be ashamed if Billy knew of it, but not of having given it. It had been wrong, but—honest. "You asked Mr. Frazer to come down on Sunday."

Cruikshanks grunted.

"He came to-night to tell you he had lost his job on the *News*. The paper is sold, and the new man is bringing his own staff."

"And he will lose his job here."

"Well, he is your friend, not mine." She got up, stretching round white arms. "I am tired, I'll go to bed."

Flora's beauty still had power to stir him. "You can sit up with him as long as he likes to stay, but when I come in you want to be off to bed," he grumbled. "Come here and kiss me."

From the other side of the room Flora looked at him wistfully. She wanted to love her husband and be a good girl, good as home-made bread. Was it possible that Billy could make her forget the—the interloper?

She wanted to forget Simon, yes, she wanted that more than anything in the world. Could Billy help her? She ran to him with a tremulous cry. "Oh, Billy, Billy, you have been so different of late. Do be your own dear self. I am not

happy, I don't understand why you are always away and that."

Billy caught her in his arms, clipped and kissed her, but did not give the confidence for which she was asking. He was not the type that shares his life with his love. As far as women were concerned, kisses were all he had to offer.

VI

Frazer was too nervously sensitive not to realize, when he shook hands with Cruikshanks in his garden the following Sunday, that the atmosphere was electric. A glance at his host's stolid face made him take the initiative.

"Don't mean to say you are really here, Cruikshanks? It's been a bit difficult lately to find you in."

Floy was standing behind her husband, and, as Frazer spoke, he saw her face relax. Oho! So she had been afraid of what he might say.

At once he understood.

Cruikshanks was suspicious, had guessed or discovered something. Frazer's spirits began to rise—"gay go the Gordons into a fight."

"If you want to find me," said Cruikshanks grimly, "I am afraid you will have to come to the office. I'm working late four days out of five."

"Must be raking in the shekels."

Billy's smile grew yet more grim. "Got to make the bally thing a success. Well, we had better be getting along."

"What is the programme?" He had supposed he was coming down to play tennis.

"The river." He turned to his wife. "Quite decided not to come with us?"

To Frazer, looking on and not quite understanding, Cruikshanks had an air of being on guard, on guard over Floy like a sort of fair, curly retriever.

"Too hot," she said.

"Cool enough on the river."

She shook her head. "But—my dear—the getting there."

"Oh, well—"

Although her manner was quite natural, Frazer had a feeling that husband and wife had arranged before he came that the little expedition should be 'for men only.' Floy was taking refuge from him behind her husband, was she? Ah, but she could not take refuge from herself.

He was sure of one thing, but of that only. She loved him, but he could not tell what love might mean to her, how far it would carry her.

Cruikshanks meant to take him on the river by himself, meant probably to have it out with him, did not realize there were things of which no decent man speaks.

"Come on, Frazer."

Floy went with the men into the hall, and for all the disturbance of Frazer's mind, he saw her as an incarnate piece of the sunshine they had left. He hungered for her, as a sane creature in a world of dreams and strange fancies.

Walking beside Cruikshanks on the asphalt of the

foot-path, he felt his gorge rising. How had this chump, this brainless, unimaginative clod, come to marry such a creature ?

In whatever way he had contrived to catch and cage her, at least he meant to keep the cage-door shut. He gave her seed and water—this Bird of Paradise—and thought of her as his, his possession.

To Frazer, Floy was the possible mate, the complement without whom life would be as an orange that has been cut in half. Her health, her sanity, were saving qualities to a man of his type, a man who was an artist in grain, who suffered from fears and dark imaginings. As for her beauty, he did not dare to think of it.

VII

The men trudged up the steep hill to the station, travelled in compartments full of other pleasure-seekers, changed trains, waited on platforms of which the flags were so hot their heat struck through the soles of canvas shoes, and at the end of what seemed to Frazer æons of discomfort, dragged themselves from a dusty road to the river.

Frazer told himself with sardonic amusement that he was suffering those things in order to hear what Cruikshanks thought of him. It would at least be a change, for hitherto he had only heard what Cruikshanks thought of himself.

He thought with dry distaste of the small-talk to which, in order to be near Floy, he had listened

A mound of cinders riddled fine could not have been more arid. Evening after evening, week after week, he had had to conceal his boredom. He was glad the end was in sight. He had faith in himself. Somehow he would get into touch with her again, open the door of that cage.

When the men had secured a punt and pushed off, Frazer suggested that they should make for a certain backwater known to both. Cruikshanks, however, seemed to find neither the psychic atmosphere nor the August heat oppressive. He poled as if he were trying to break a record, and Frazer, watching lazily, wondered whether the man were not trying to convince by his prowess a doubting self. He studied him with growing distaste . . . too fat, and of a clumsy build, but strong. The sort of fellow, with his curly hair, his blue eyes, his red and white skin, whom a woman would call handsome.

Floy had liked him enough to marry him ! It must have been because he had been the first to ask her. Ridiculous child ; why could not she have waited a little ?

On the way to the river Cruikshanks had read a Sunday paper. He now concentrated on his work, and Frazer, with some thought of precipitating a crisis, began idly to talk of his affairs. " Free-lance journalism is too much of a hand-to-mouth affair for me. I shan't be content till I get another permanent billet."

" Could you not get sent out as a War Correspondent ? "

The wish was, no doubt, father to the suggestion. "If you are thinking of this particular little war, the men are all chosen."

"Not my concern, of course, but I shouldn't have thought a man like you would have been content to hang about newspaper offices."

The fume of his contempt was rank in the air. Pressmen, novelists, poets—shoddy. He, Cruikshanks, was a man, led a man's life, but these scribblers—

Frazer grinned happily. "Necessary to live."

The other grunted in disagreement. "I shall be taking my wife away next week."

"Really? Where are you going?"

"Have not yet made up our minds." Last August he had insisted on Frazer accompanying them, and the man's thought dwelt fleetingly on the long blue-golden days of sailing, bathing, motoring. It was then that his pleasant flirtation with Floy had deepened into this desperate love.

"Going to be away long?"

"Shouldn't wonder. Er—you staying on in town?"

"Got to find a job." He looked full at the man in possession. "I don't say everything comes to him who knows how to wait; but if a man wants anything strongly enough, he does not rest till he gets it."

It was a challenge. Cruikshanks might throw him out of their lives, but he would come back, and ultimately the decision would lie with Floy. Let the other keep her, if he could.

Cruikshanks flushed a deep brick red. "Do you think," he said, hard-eyed, "that you have been playing the game?"

"What game?" Frazer's voice sank to a guttural of primitive rage.

"Was it quite the thing to dine with my wife when I was away?"

"Your—wife—" The man poling the boat had become a blackness, solid and with a red outline. Everything was red, and behind the thin wall of his self-control was a devil of excessive rage that leapt and slavered and cried. His hands were clenched on its chair, but it jerked at the evenness of his voice. "You are within your rights in objecting," he said, and wondered that Cruikshanks did not realize the danger in which he stood. On the broad river, under the summer sun, in the midst of life—"Will you pole into the bank? I will land here."

"Is that all you have to say?" A true Englishman, he made no guess at what was passing in the other's mind. Enough that this Frazer, this fellow who could not even hold down the flimsy jobs that newspapers provided, had dared to look at his, Cruikshanks', wife. The insult of it! He felt it would be a pleasure to hit him with his bare hands, give him a hiding.

"Words," Frazer said in that queer, broken voice, "words serve no purpose." He indicated with his head where he would be set down.

This fool thought that quarrels were a vent for irritation.

They were a vent, but not for words. They might, if one were not terribly careful, become a vent for the hot air which had been a man's soul.

Cruikshanks thrust the pole into the river, but in the turmoil of his disappointment and wrath, without nicety, without skill. It slipped over an obstruction, and he lurched forward. The punt dipped, its other side rose crazily, turned, and men and gear were in the water.

Frazer, a good swimmer, had no difficulty in reaching the bank. His last thought as he shot out of the punt had been that Cruikshanks had overturned it in order to give him a ducking.

A ducking? How futile. The sort of thing an ass like Cruikshanks would do. As he scrambled up the bank, his rage cooled, less by Father Thames than by the clumsy methods of the enemy, he turned to see what had become of the boat. He had to wipe the water off his face before he could see clearly. Then he made out an object in mid-stream, another—what was Cruikshanks about? He had often boasted of his swimming—

Had he lost his head? Out there the current was strong. For a long moment Frazer stood gazing, careless of what happened to Cruikshanks. Though still hostile, he was puzzled and interested. What was the fellow doing?

Not—not drowning?

For a second longer he hesitated, then, stripping off his coat, plunged back into the stream.

VIII

The grip of an indefinite fear fell heavily on Mrs. Cruikshanks when, later that day, on opening the front door to a knock which should have heralded her husband's return, she found Frazer waiting on the step. She knew at once that he must be bearer of ill tidings, and her glance travelled past him, along the drive, on to the quiet suburban road. Where was Billy ?

Frazer walked in without speaking, went into the drawing-room, and she followed in that haze of uncertainty which preceded knowledge, which is a preparation for it.

" Billy ? " she said.

To the authorities Frazer, the dead man's companion, had seemed the right person to carry the tidings to his family. He did not appear to be any the worse for his wetting, and someone must go. Also, Frazer was entirely willing. They, being strangers, could not realize that, in his then state of mind, he was perhaps the last person who should have been sent.

Floy, following him into the drawing-room, was aware of him as different. His flannels, which had been cut by a well-known military tailor, were shrunken, out of shape, but the change in him was more than clothes deep. He had a dishevelled air, but the change in him was more than skin-deep. His face, his expression—

She felt horribly afraid. "Where is Billy? What have you done with him?"

Frazer saw himself standing on the bank, blinded by old hatred, and hesitating while a man drowned. "I did nothing," he said, his voice grievous, "that was it, I did nothing."

He had a dazed look and, in her anxiety, Flora caught at his arm and shook it. "What has happened? Pull yourself together, Simon, and tell me."

He passed his tongue over dry lips. "The boat was upset."

"What do you mean?"

"The pole slipped and he overbalanced. It tipped up the punt."

Her voice was a cry of apprehension. "And Billy?"

"When I got to the bank I looked for him. He—he can swim."

"Oh, go on, go on. Let me know."

"I saw his head a long way from the shore. He seemed to be in difficulties, so I—I plunged in again—"

"And saved him?" Already the gold-grey eyes were softening with relief.

"No—some men, a boat—"

"They got to him first? Oh, thank God!"

"Don't—don't. There was a doctor. He did what he could."

The fingers that rested on his sleeve clenched. "What do you mean? Oh, I can't bear it. Simon—"

"It was no use."

Her voice rose on a shrill note. "What?"

"We could not bring him round."

The room heaved around her, and, loosening her hold of him, she staggered to a chair.

IX

That her parents lived near by was fortunate for Floy. At her request Frazer went for them. Mr. Burley would lift some of the burden from his child's shoulders; Mrs. Burley would be a staff on which to lean.

The elder couple were getting ready for church—frock-coat, shining hat and a little lady in lavender. Seeing them in such decent and proper garb, bent on so conventional an errand, Frazer wondered how he was to crash in on their Sunday security with his news. How could he say to people who were looking out money for the churchwarden's bag, "Your son-in-law is lying dead in the midst of a curious crowd; dead on sodden grass, in a field."

The Burleys conceived of death as something which was expected and prepared for, which came at the end of a period of nursing, medicines, doctor's visits. It took place within the four walls of a room, was quickly shut into a coffin, and eventually—the sooner the better—hidden in a little low house, a house without windows.

When Frazer spoke, they seemed as if they could not believe. Billy—Flora's husband—

Frazer saw realization come, saw them blenching from it, fear in their hearts. Hitherto they had been confident in their solid middle-age.

"How terrible!" they said, and an old dread looked out of their eyes.

X

At the bottom of an ottoman in Mrs. Burley's bedroom lay a black dress. Not long since she had been in mourning for her son, and the remembrance of that unassuaged grief rose in tears as she changed her lavender silk for the old gown.

Her husband would go with Mr. Frazer and bring poor Billy home, home to Stormfleet.

The funeral would be from their house; indeed, they would do all they could for the child.

The man went with Mrs. Burley as far as the gate of Denewood, then took the field path to the station. She was left to find her way in.

It seemed to her impossible to knock, to make any sound whatever, and she went quietly round to the garden, found the French windows of the drawing-room open.

Floy was in the slip of a room by the front door that Billy had called his study. In restless misery she had wandered about the house, finally had gone there as to a refuge. It was as if he himself had bidden her come in.

The place smelt of leather and tobacco, sporting papers lay on the table, a pair of slippers by the

hearth. So strongly was the man's personality impressed on the room that Floy felt an instant lightening of the burthen she carried.

Her head was aching and she felt it would be pleasant to lay it against the cool black marble of the mantelpiece.

On one side stood an ashtray, a pink pig supporting a bowl of green ware in which lay a half-smoked cigarette. Billy had put it there that morning when ready to start. She had seen him do it. With a sudden heave and uprush she realized that he, who so loved his creature-comforts, would never smoke another cigarette.

She understood at last that Billy had been deprived accidentally, carelessly, irrevocably, of his pleasant life. Billy, to whom little things—his dinner, his drinks, his smokes—were of the first importance, had had them snatched away. She saw him as a child, undeservedly punished, helpless in the face of an immense injustice; and in that moment of sympathy, of understanding, she forgot herself. Poor Billy—oh, poor, poor Billy!

XI

William Cruikshanks had been a young man without prospects, until an old aunt had left him a tiny business. Half-a-dozen girls working in a long room had made enough lace to supply Miss Loetitia Cruikshanks' needs, but in her nephew's hands the room had grown to a factory, and the

lace had deteriorated into a cheap but saleable article.

Until the business had been unexpectedly left to him he had been a clerk in a bank and had lived at Streatham with a widowed mother. It was a joyless, poverty-stricken household, and he had escaped from it as soon as he conveniently could.

"I don't wonder my father couldn't stick it," he had said to Floy; "I can't, either. The Mater ought to have been one of old Cromwell's chaps, but I like a bit of fun." Nevertheless, he had given his mother what money he could spare.

"Not much good doing that, though," he had grumbled, "for she just hoards and hoards. If she were keen on the business it would be different, but she won't have a share in it, says I'm like my father and that he let what they had slip through his fingers."

"And did he, Billy?" Floy had asked.

"Well, yes. You see, he had ideas, and was always thinking out improvements, and he dropped money over them, more than he could afford to lose, poor chap. Mother hung on to what her father had left her, and it was as well that she did, or we should not have had a bean."

"Then she has enough to live on?"

"There is no doubt she could live more comfortably than she does, but she hasn't much. A couple of hundred, perhaps. You see, she is one of those people who are not happy unless they can put by a tenth of their income. It is a bit hard on Tish."

Tish was his sister, the one creature who had been good to him during those early years. Floy had made up her mind that she would do what she could for Tish.

XII

Mrs. Robert Cruikshanks was dark-skinned, with opaque grey eyes, set deep in puckered skin. Though over sixty, her teeth were sound, and her iron-grey hair abundant. She was, in fact, a woman of stiff vitality, very strong and very set.

She disapproved—as such a woman would—of her daughter-in-law. “That hussy,” she said. Billy’s home, comfortable, silver-bright, airy, had seemed to her the last word in reprehensive luxury. Not that she blamed him, of course. The dinners, theatres, card-parties, they were to amuse Flora.

No good came of living like that.

Billy’s death was nearly as great a tragedy for her as it had been for him. Her affection, cruel and proud, had been centred on this only son. She had admired and, in spite of innate caution, had believed in him, had looked forward, indeed, to an era of reflected glory, she whose life had been one disappointment after another.

His death came as a crushing blow. There was nothing left. Her daughter was unlikely to marry, and “that hussy” had no children.

Her heart cried out, as David’s had done, “Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son !”

XIII

The will was short. William Cruikshanks had left all he had to his wife and made her father executor. Old Mrs. Cruikshanks, her large-featured face turned towards the lawyer, sighed and, in her lap, the knotted fingers gripped each other.

She did not glance at Flora, although she knew where she sat in the black circle; knew, with a resentful gladness, that her beauty was tear-dimmed; knew, without looking, just how much. During the days that had elapsed since her son's death, her despair had lightened. There was still, perhaps, a little something for which to live.

When the lawyer had folded the crackling parchment and risen, she got up, heavily because she was rheumatic, and crossed the room to her daughter-in-law.

"Have you any plans?"

Flora's mind had not travelled beyond its grief. "Plans? I had not thought. I expect my father will arrange for me."

"I am a lonely old woman, and we are both sorrowing. I feel it would comfort me if you—my dear boy's wife and all that is left of him—would come and live with me."

Flora was startled. The old woman, in her out-of-date clothes, and with her long lips, long chin, had a compelling air. No doubt but that she had loved Billy—after her fashion. Days of grieving for him, for poor Billy unwillingly dead, had

softened Flora. She had the pity of the loved woman for the one whose unpleasing, though perhaps inherited qualities, had left her with an empty heart. But—live with Mrs. Cruikshanks? For a little—perhaps.

“You—you don’t mean you really want me—”

“I have lost everything,” Mrs. Cruikshanks said with a movement of work-roughened hands, and it did not seem to Flora as if she were exaggerating. Faded, inadequate Tish, what use was she to anyone? “Perhaps I could face life again if I had you to talk to sometimes of—of William.”

Her voice had a forlorn, dragging note, and Flora’s heart ached for her. So old, so lonely, so done.

“I don’t want to impose on you. You are young, and will want to live your own life. I thought if we shared the house and you had your own rooms and servant, and then sat with me when you could spare the time.”

Her own rooms and servant—the plan sounded feasible, and she must live somewhere. Flora was in a mood when she could imagine herself glad to sacrifice her wishes to those of Billy’s ageing mother.

“Then I may consider that settled? Half the house yours, and what else we have we will share. Loetitia—” she beckoned to her daughter. “Flora has been telling me that as her home has been broken up she would like to live with us. I shall find it a comfort, a great comfort to have her.”

The tall, florid woman looked as if she found the

news too pleasant to be true. "Oh, Floy," she said humbly, "how good of you!"

Mrs. Cruikshanks gave her daughter a look that was hardly kind, yet that sincere word had helped to forward her plans. Flora felt she was wanted. "I will ask my father," she said.

XIV

"Will you come into the study, Floy? I have been going into your husband's affairs, and I would like you to know how you stand."

Flora followed her father into the red room. It was a comfort to feel that she had someone to manage her affairs. Still, she would be glad to know how much money she had.

"This is your husband's will." Taking the elastic band off a small bundle of papers, he picked out those of which he was in need. "Very sensible and to the point."

"He made it the day after we were married." Her face, patchy with weeping, quivered. The memory of it was too clear—herself and Billy in the cab driving through London to the solicitor's office in the city, their climb to the dusty room in which sat the kind old man who had looked at them shrewdly, congratulated them. Five years ago—only five.

"Your husband's having left me executor simplifies matters." He cleared his throat, hesitated. "I am afraid, my dear, that what I have

to tell you will be disappointing. You have looked forward, of course, to being left comfortably off—”

“Well—”

“William had not much capital,” Mr. Burley said thoughtfully. “And he was after the big trade, get-rich-quick-or-break, you know. I’m afraid, child, I’m afraid it was break!”

“Oh, dad!”

“When he suggested my putting money into the business, which he did last Christmas, I suspected he was getting into difficulties. I dare say you noticed he was a bit worried?”

Worried? Billy had not been his old easy self for over a twelvemonth; but she had thought—why, she had even blamed him.

“He had been speculating—rather wildly, I am afraid—and when he died was on the verge of bankruptcy. Truth was, he ought not to have been on his own, he had not the head for it.” He looked thoughtfully at his daughter. What did she think of William’s accident? He had heard things in the city about his son-in-law which had made him wonder. “Well, poor chap,” he said, “he is gone, and his death came at the right time for him.” Mr. Burley’s tone changed, grew brisk. “I am afraid the only asset is the lease of the factory. I have been able to dispose of that, and the money will about cover what is owing.”

“He had insured his life.”

“Disposed of the policy—at a loss.”

“It was for five thousand pounds.”

“Hard on you, Floy, confoundedly hard.”

"What have I?"

"The furniture of your house and the silver."

"The furniture that you gave me and my wedding presents!" That was to say, she had practically nothing. The provision made for her had vanished, vanished because Billy was not as clever as she had thought. Five years, and she was back at the starting-point—a girl dependent on her father.

"Why didn't you help him, Dad?"

"William thought I was old-fashioned, he would not take my advice."

"Ah, yes, I remember—you never speculate."

"No—well, no good crying over spilt milk!" He selected a paper from the little pile, a letter. "I suppose you know that William made his mother an allowance of £100 a year."

"I knew he gave her money, but not the exact sum."

"His counterfoils show that £50 was paid to her every June and every Christmas until last year. In June, the usual cheque not being forthcoming, she wrote to him on the subject. Here is a copy of his reply. You will note that he says he cannot continue the allowance until his business is bringing a larger return, but that he hopes it may not be long before he sends another cheque. He never did, though. What are Mrs. Cruikshanks' circumstances?"

"She has about two hundred a year."

"A sufficiency."

"It is not very much."

"We look at these things differently, my dear."

I began life on a wage of twelve pounds a year, not quite five shillings a week ; and out of that had to buy my clothes and find myself in everything but food and lodging. A woman with one daughter should be able to live comfortably on two hundred a year."

"She has asked me to live with her."

Mr. Burley, hard man of the world, pinched up his lips. "Did she suggest it before William's will was read, or after?"

"Er—" Flora considered, "I believe it was after. Yes, it was."

"William left everything to you. There was not anything to leave, but she does not know that ; she is counting on your having plenty of money. She won't want you now."

He placed the papers in a drawer and got up. "You don't imagine, Floy, that I should let that old vampire suck you dry? Besides, we want you at home, your mother and I."

XV

When Mrs. Cruikshanks wrote to remind Flora of her promise, Mr. Burley answered the letter. He thanked her for her kind offer, but said that for the present his daughter would make her home with them.

The old lady replied with an invitation to Flora to spend Christmas—the first Christmas since dear William's death—at Streatham, and the girl,

temporizing, offered to go to her for the New Year. Her father might be correct in his estimate of her mother-in-law's hopes and intentions, but Flora felt sorry for the old woman. To have lost her only son, to be poor and have a grudging heart—how pitiful. Driving over on the last day of the year, she contrasted the comfort of the car in which she sat with the pinched conditions of life at 12A—originally 13, but changed to 12A in deference to the wishes of prospective tenants—Mount Road, Streatham.

Mr. Burley had sent with her a hamper, containing fowls, butter, eggs and home-cured pork. "I don't want them to be at any expense on your account," he had said in his cheery way, and Flora had been grateful. She let her mind dwell on the hothouse fruit, the pots of cream, the luxuries in the hamper. It was wonderful the softening influence that good food had. Tender breasts of chicken, rosy slices of ham, bloomy grapes, each as big as a plum, might induce even Mrs. Cruikshanks to take a less harsh view of life.

The houses in Mount Road—which was a cul-de-sac with a skyline of commonplace roofs—were of brown brick. The sidewalks, of a speckled asphalt, had invaded the small front gardens, running smoothly from the metalled road to the doors. Flora, walking up the path of No. 12A, wondered why it should be duller-looking than other houses in the row. The curtains above and below, the shrubs in the garden, ah, yes. While neighbouring dwellings had bright hangings, golden euonymas or

red winter berry, No. 12A's windows were hung with a heavy green rep, the hedge was of black-green privet and, although the bedrooms wore the usual muslin veil, they were without the heading of polished brass that winked from less discreet chambers.

Flora had rung once, had heard a distant tinkle, and was thinking she must ring again when, without any preliminary sound, the door opened a few inches.

"I was afraid it was a hawker," Mrs. Cruikshanks said, adding in an explanatory tone, as she stood back for Flora to enter. "Loetitia is at choir practice and the day-girl goes home early."

"How inconvenient," said Flora vaguely, as the chauffeur carried the hamper into the little empty kitchen. She lifted the lid. "This is with my father's good wishes for the New Year."

"Very kind of him"; but Mrs. Cruikshanks' tone was that of a person receiving money long due. Flora, catching the hungry gleam in her eye, must take that for thanks.

"We will unpack it when Loetitia comes in," Mrs. Cruikshanks said, leading the way to the small back room that served as dining and sitting room. "Why do you consider it inconvenient to have a girl who goes home to sleep?"

Flora had spoken idly. "Well, er—it must mean that you or Tish have to cook the dinn—the supper."

"Two women living by themselves do not require a heavy meal at night, and we wanted her room. We have a—a paying guest."

"A paying guest? What an innovation!" But she thought it plucky of them to try and add to their income. It was difficult to imagine a lodger being comfortable in that house, but lodgers were lucky people in that they were not bound to stay where they were not happy. Pulling off her gloves, Flora sat down on a chair by the hearth. How curious it felt to be back in this chilly house, with Mrs. Cruikshanks presiding over the fire, like a priestess over an altar.

"An innovation," she was saying, and her face, unsmiling, grey, took on a harsh expression. She had been proud of the long idleness of her life, and it humiliated her to feel that, like other people, she had to earn her living. "An innovation which unfortunately was necessary." Her deep-set eyes were taking note of Flora's furs, her long jet chain, the cut of her gown. To whatever straits she herself might be reduced, it was evident that William's widow had plenty of money. "If my boy had lived—" she said.

XVI

Alone in the room Tish had vacated for her, Flora felt at last sufficiently at home to unbutton her coat. Mr. Burley had not expressed an opinion with regard to this visit. Though he did not believe in the genuineness of Mrs. Cruikshanks' plea, he had never stood between his children and the experiences of life. When Flora talked of the old

woman's affection for her son, therefore, he had merely nodded. Let the child go and see for herself.

And already Flora was wondering whether she would be able to comfort in any way the woman who loved and had lost Billy. She found that she did not know how to begin. She and her mother-in-law, they were so very far apart. Unpacking slowly, she laid her few clothes in the freshly-papered drawers. Mrs. Cruikshanks, she thought, belonged to another generation, not to the last, but the one before that, and it was difficult to reach her, to understand what she was feeling, what, in fact, life meant to her.

However, a bond existed in the mutual regard they had for the dead. Poor Billy! He had slept in this very room, in this chill, white, comfortless place. He had looked out on to the drab road, the fronts of the uninspired houses, and—he had hated it.

Mrs. Cruikshanks had not known. She had loved Billy and made him unhappy, so unhappy that he had fled from her. What a queer love!

No use dwelling on that, however, for Billy was gone, and his mother in her turn was unhappy. Flora meant to do what she could by talking of him, by offering gifts that must be welcome. She collected the odds and ends she had brought and carried them downstairs.

She found Loetitia in the front room lighting a fire, and Flora, looking at her kindly, wondered why, whatever you did for Tish, she always looked

—well, all wrong. She was not, after all, very plain. Her face was rather large and too like a plate, a dinner-plate; and no one in their senses plaited straight, thin hair and twisted the plaits round and round at the back, and, oh dear, her clothes! But the fair, rosy face was pleasant, and she had, yes, “a heart of gold.” Flora smiled a trifle sadly over that saying. When people were clever or attractive no one worried about their hearts.

“We sit in here of an evening now,” Loetitia said in a satisfied voice. “I am glad. I like things done properly.”

Billy, too, had wanted to “live like other people.”

“Mamma says that we cannot afford two fires, so I lay this myself. It saves sticks, and I don’t light it until just before dinner. Then we can let the other go out.”

As she rose from her knees, Flora saw that she wore, pinned across her large head, a black velvet bow. It lay between the smoothly brushed-back hair and the nest of plaits; and it emphasized the fact that Loetitia’s head sloped from the forehead up. So like her to make what should have been an ornament, disfiguring.

“Why, Tish, how spry you look. Who made the bow?”

Loetitia glanced at her reflection in the over-mantel. “You like it? Of course black velvet always looks well on fair hair, shows up the lights in it. After all, it is a woman’s duty to make the best of herself.”

A fire in the front room—the sprucing up of Loetitia—could it be that the lodger was a man?

For a moment Floy wondered over him. He would probably be in some way connected with the chapel Mrs. Cruikshanks attended, perhaps a deacon or lay preacher. Had he noticed the velvet bow, and did he like Tish?

“Mamma won’t let me change for supper, but I always make some little difference. A touch here and there. I think one should when gentlemen are going to be present.”

XVII

Carrying her knitting, a helmet in iron-grey wool that she was making for the Deep Sea Fisheries’ Mission, Mrs. Cruikshanks came into the front room. The disturbance Loetitia made laying the cloth had sent her in search of quiet; and she established herself in a hard, upright chair, the lamp and her spectacle-case on a square table at her side. Flora, waiting observantly, reflected that although the case went everywhere with its owner, never once had she seen the glasses worn. Mrs. Cruikshanks in horn-rimmed spectacles might have looked grandmotherly; but no, it was impossible to think of her as a grandmother, or even as old. She wasn’t any age. She must always have had that leathery sort of face, those eyes with the something behind them, the something that had daunted—Billy. Although he had longed to escape from his

dreary home, he had not dared, not till he met Flora. Then he had caught her by the hand and they had laughed together and run off. After that, until business difficulties had overwhelmed him, it had been all laughter for Billy. Flora's heart sank under its weight of pity—Billy, poor drowned Billy.

She was holding in her lap the mementoes of the dead man which she had brought his mother, and, as soon as Mrs. Cruikshanks was settled on the hard chair by the white stone mantelpiece, Flora offered them. "I thought you might like to have these; they were Billy's."

She laid them on the table, framed photographs of Billy and his fellow footballers, of Billy on the river, of schoolboy Billy running; the Bible his mother had given him when he was confirmed and which, ever since, had lain on the chest of drawers in his room; his cigarette case and a signet ring which had belonged to his father.

"For me?" Mrs. Cruikshanks said, and the hand she put out to them was tremulous. She had been taken by surprise. Soon after Billy's death certain old belongings that he had brought away on his marriage had been returned to her. She had supposed they were all that she would be given.

She took up the signet ring—her husband's monogram, W. J. C., was cut in the black agate. She had bought it with her girlish savings, had given it to him on their wedding day, had taken it from his dead hand to give to their son.

It fitted her ring-finger, and she might wear it,

keep it from now on. Her boy had left her for "that hussy," and what had he got by it? No son to follow him, no one to take the ring from her own old hand, when she was called away.

"I shall be glad to have these," she said, looking over the photographs, and seeing herself by her husband's side watching the school race. William had won; there had been a cup. She looked up, but to Flora's surprise her eyes were hostile.

"I wonder you can bear to part from them."

"The photographs were taken before I knew Billy."

"The signet-ring, too."

"Billy so seldom wore it. He valued it because it was his father's."

"And his cigarette-case, the one he carried about with him. Very generous of you."

"He had it with him when—" She paused, understanding that Mrs. Cruikshanks was jealous! She had been jealous of Flora when Billy was alive, jealous of their good times together. She was jealous now lest he be forgotten. She wanted to keep her dead—unburied.

Ah, poor old thing, that was all she had—the dead.

"I thought you should have something that had been on him—then."

It seemed to Flora as if between their two spirits the elder woman held a veil. Only her eyes looked over it, the fierce eyes of which Billy had been so much afraid.

"Very generous of you—"

As she spoke, a step which was not Loetitia's

flat-footed shuffle, but quick and young, passed down the narrow hall, mounted the stairs. "The lodger," thought Flora, "and what a hurry he is in."

Mrs. Cruikshanks looked up. She listened. Almost imperceptibly she smiled.

"Why, she must like him," thought Flora, but was arrested by a quality in her mother-in-law's smile. "No, not like him, but like having him here."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Cruikshanks, returning from some mental journey which appeared to have given her satisfaction, "I suppose that as you are living with your parents, you have warehoused your furniture?"

"My father advised me to sell it."

"The home William made for you?"

"Oh, well, of course Billy bought a few things, but most of it came from my father. If you remember, it was his wedding present to us."

"Yes." She appeared to be considering something. "Er—yes, and he was left executor." She must not forget that if Mr. Burley had not interfered Flora would by now have been sharing her home and contributing largely to its upkeep. Her glance sharpened till she looked more than ever like a bird of prey. "Humph, yes, executor."

"He was." Flora wondered what she had in mind.

"I suppose you knew that William made me an allowance?"

"I knew about it."

"His will was quite incomprehensible to me. No mention of my name. Still—he may have given you instructions with regard to that—that little annuity."

As Mrs. Cruikshanks spoke she leaned forward, peering from below the lamp at the figure on the sofa.

"Not exactly, no, but I can tell you how matters stand. Billy said the half-yearly payments would start again when the business brought a larger return—"

"You saw the letter?"

"It was amongst his papers."

"Well—?"

"There wasn't time—"

"I have no doubt your father, who is an excellent man of business, has disposed of the lace factory to advantage. You are all right, but I—"—her voice had a creaking sound as of a door that turns on unoiled hinges—"because of my son's death I am to be the loser."

For a moment Flora hung uncertain. The truth would be wounding, yet it would prevent a long misunderstanding. "Well, no," she said reluctantly, "for when poor Billy died his business was in a bad way—I am afraid a very bad way. He—he was on the verge of bankruptcy."

"Impossible!" but she looked startled, angry, almost afraid, and Flora remembered that once before Mrs. Cruikshanks had had to listen to bad news of this kind. Her husband's business, that too had failed. "Why," she was saying, "I *know*

William made a success of the factory. He—he started it.”

“It was a sort of speculation, and it did not turn out as Billy had hoped.”

“Did not? It would have if he had lived.”

Let her keep her faith in the dead man. “As it is,” Flora said pitifully, “there is nothing. Nothing for you and nothing for me.”

But Mrs. Cruikshanks was not convinced. “At least,” she said, “you have his insurance.”

“That went, I’m afraid. You see, he was really in difficulties, poor fellow.” The first bit of cargo he had jettisoned had been the policy which was to have safeguarded his wife’s future. An adventurer, Billy, and those who had sailed with him had taken chances.

Mrs. Cruikshanks drew a long breath and sat back in her chair. For the moment she had nothing to say. She began to knit, the needles clicking in her gnarled hands, the ball of coarse iron-grey yarn twitching as it unrolled, and Flora watched her with deepening pity. Strong, irreconcilable, harsh, yet, after all, an unhappy woman. Unhappy because of her difficult nature. Strange that happiness should depend on the character with which a person had been born, that it should come, not from outside events, but from an attitude of the spirit.

The sitting-room door was opened quietly and, as Loetitia’s voice came to them saying that supper was on the table, a man entered.

“Always punctual,” Mrs. Cruikshanks said, and

Flora, to her immense surprise, found herself looking into the dark, troubled eyes of Simon Frazer.

XVIII

During the months that had elapsed since Billy's death, Flora had had no news of Frazer. He had not come to the funeral, had not written. She had known he was a sensitive man. His nature had depths about which she thought humbly and fearfully. Had the shock of Billy's death killed Frazer's feeling for herself? Love was a queer thing, it came and it went, and no one knew why it should do either.

She had lost Billy and she perceived that she had also lost Frazer—in fact, that life as far as she was concerned, had suddenly resolved itself into a succession of losses, a sort of continuous darkness—a tunnel. There would be light ahead. She had not been able to see it, not yet, but she knew it was there, that presently she would get to it.

To find that Frazer was the lodger, the paying guest of her grim mother-in-law and the man for whom Tish was wearing the egregious bow, filled her with a glad amazement. She took his offered hand in silence, a wondering silence.

This stagnant hole and—Frazer! How had it come about?

Stealing a glance at his face, she saw that he was in some way changed. He did not look well. The eyes were sunken, the bones of the face more

salient than formerly, while the sallow skin which had been warmed with red, was now a dead black and white. But he looked more than merely thin and ill. His gaze, that dark vivid gaze, had dulled.

Well—he was perhaps tired after a long day's work.

Her heart was beating quickly. She felt almost faint. How good, how deeply satisfying to see him again, to see even this altered Frazer.

She felt that Mrs. Cruikshanks was watching her, was looking from Frazer's quiet, exhausted face to hers. But—Frazer had been a friend, and it was only natural she should be glad to see him again. She began to talk in the old gay fashion, to question him. "You left the *News*, I suppose?" she said, as they went into the dining-room.

"Yes, got a job on the *Sunday Press*." His voice seemed to have lost its vibrating quality. It was tired, indifferent.

"A day job?"

"Mr. Frazer works day and night," said Loetitia, smiling at him. "He sits up till all hours. I think he must be writing a novel."

"A novel that embodied his own experiences would be interesting," said Mrs. Cruikshanks, taking her seat at the head of the table and beginning to pour out the tea. In her stiff black gown, her black cap, the lappets of which fell to her shoulders, and with her long features, she looked like a hoodie crow.

At the sound of that creaking voice Frazer had blenched. It was as if he had been subtly hurt.

His experiences? Flora thought, and why not? They were probably much the same as those of other men. She felt she must say something reassuring. "We saw a story of yours in the *New Magazine* last month—it was jolly good."

Frazer, who seemed to be eating more as a matter of form than because he felt hungry, looked across at her. What a pleasure to be gazing at that bloomy face. "I am pretty lucky with my stories these days."

Mrs. Cruikshanks caught at his wandering attention with a rattle of teacups. "Ay, your luck changed the day my son died."

The colour flushed into Flora's cheek. It was one thing to talk of Billy because the thought of him was present to your mind and heart, but quite another to harp on the accident that had killed him. She spoke out valiantly. "How glad he would have been. Dear Billy, he always said you were going to be a big man."

From behind the tea tray Mrs. Cruikshanks turned opaque eyes on her daughter-in-law. This light and foolish girl William had married had the resiliency of rubber, but she, like everyone else, would have her vulnerable spot. In her dark mind the old woman was wondering whether Frazer were not that spot.

During the months that had elapsed since her son's death she had been brooding over it, making plans of various sorts, and Flora had been brought to Streatham to further them. She was to disgorge some of William's money, the money Mrs. Cruik-

shanks still believed that she had. She was also to be made to realize that she was a widow. William might lie hidden in the cold damp earth, but he should not be forgotten. Neither by his wife nor by his so-called friend.

She had them both, wife and friend, and time was on her side, time with its dark humiliations.

"When my Father read that story in the *New* he said how sorry he was that we had lost sight of you. He would like you to come over again."

Frazer's face lost its apathy, and Flora saw that his eyes were hungry. Then—he had not forgotten?

Mrs. Cruikshanks turned to him. "You would hardly care to go to Eastham—now?"

Why, she hates him, the girl thought. Hate? What a big word! People loved, but they did not hate, not nowadays.

Silly to exaggerate, and yet Mrs. Cruikshanks had looked at Frazer in a curious, gloating way. If there had been such things as witches, Flora could have imagined one glancing at some man she had ill-wished with much the same expression as had lain in her mother-in-law's eyes. Was it possible the old woman *knew*?

After all, what was there to know? The men had been boating and, owing to Billy's clumsiness—the punt had been upset. A momentary hesitation on the bank, and Frazer had plunged in again, swum out. At the inquest he had been complimented on the gallant attempt he had made to rescue his friend, an attempt persisted in until he himself had nearly succumbed.

He had hesitated for a moment because Billy had been offensive and he, Frazer, had been angry. He could, as Flora knew, be murderously angry. But he had been so much ashamed of that momentary hesitation that he had risked his own life. She understood that in his sharp change of mood, he had offered it in exchange. In spite of what had happened she could forgive. What was more, she felt that Billy, too, would have forgiven.

Although during those last anxious months he had been irritable and difficult, he never—dear old Billy—never bore malice.

“Not go to Eastham,” she said pleasantly, “but that would be absurd. Mr. Frazer must not let the loss of one friend keep him from others. My father will write,” she was deliberately friendly, “and you will come, won’t you?”

She smiled at him, waiting until he had falteringly agreed. Mrs. Cruikshanks also looked at him, listening. It was as if she were certain, not of what he would say, but of the issue.

XIX

After supper Mrs. Cruikshanks led the way back to the front room. Her full black skirts filled the doorway for a moment, and Flora turned to Frazer.

“It was a surprise to find you here.”

“Your father asked me to break the news to Mrs. Cruikshanks.”

“Did he?”

"She had been thinking of letting her extra room, so I took it. It seemed—I felt I had to."

Flora thought she understood. The old woman had made a poor mouth. She had talked of the "little annuity," made Frazer feel responsible. "She isn't as hard up as she would like us to think."

Was she bleeding him of more than money?

"You mustn't—" he said, not meeting her eyes, "she will notice you are talking to me."

Flora's head went up. "Well?" she said.

He did not speak, but his gesture was eloquent.

XX

Loetitia had stayed behind to clear the table, and Flora, wondering that people should care to preserve old, ugly and uncomfortable furniture, had seated herself on the horsehair sofa. Sharp hairs thrust an occasional needle point through, reminding her that Billy had once said the sofa was "at least softer than the Mater."

Mrs. Cruikshanks, her hands already busy with yarn and needles, called to Frazer.

"I want you to see these," and she offered him the photographs. "They were taken before you knew my son. They show the promise of his youth."

To Flora, listening, the words seemed to carry a hidden meaning. At supper, too. Nothing you could lay your finger on, yet always a suggestion of—of—

She felt vaguely alarmed. Not for herself. To her, Mrs. Cruikshanks was only a crabby old woman; but Frazer had an unusually sensitive nature. He might suffer. She admitted to herself that he did. It was a matter of nerves.

The reading-lamp, shaded by an opaque green glass, cast a white light on the photographs, a green glow over the rest of the room. It showed with a dim sufficiency the predatory face of the old woman, the white intensity of Frazer.

Flora could see that he was suffering, and anger rose in her like sap in a young tree.

"Cut off in the flower of his youth," Mrs. Cruikshanks was saying, as he took the photographs.

"Oh, really," Flora murmured, with a half-smile, as at a statement that would in other circumstances be amusing, but in these could only be deprecated, "my poor Billy—after all, he was thirty."

Across the shining needles which were continually stabbing at the grey wool, Mrs. Cruikshanks met her daughter-in-law's eyes.

"She hates me, too," thought Flora, her smile deepening. "Well, I don't wonder."

XXI

"Loetitia!"

The chink of glass and silver had ceased, and the girl could be heard moving about the kitchen. When Mrs. Cruikshanks called, the slight noises

stopped. It was as if by silence and invisibility Tish would have obliterated herself.

"Loetitia, don't keep me waiting."

For a moment the girl's large loose figure was silhouetted against the light of the little hall; then, with a dragging step, she crossed the room and sat down.

Mrs. Cruikshanks turned to her daughter-in-law. "Mr. Frazer was my dear William's friend. He takes pity on an old woman's loneliness and sorrow. He talks to me of my poor lad . . . yes, every evening."

In the green gloom the emaciation of Frazer's face seemed more pronounced. "Your son's wife is here."

Flora got up. "I am rather tired. If you will excuse me, I will go to bed."

The old hand over which the iron-grey wool jerked and flew, was raised in an imperative gesture. "Sit down."

"I beg your pardon?"

At once the other's voice changed to entreaty. "You—his wife—you will want to stay—"

"Mr. Frazer will be better able to talk to you if I am not here."

"He is afraid your grief is still too raw for you to speak of William's death."

"Oh, I—"

"Yes," she nodded, and in her hands the needles clicked, piercing the tortured wool, which yet unrolling, gave itself to their steel. Flora was puzzled. Why should it hurt Frazer to talk of Billy?

"Dear Billy," she said softly, "it is not every friend who remembers for so long. It is good of you, Simon."

By giving him his name, she showed her mother-in-law that, if there were anything behind this talk, any devilry, she ranged herself definitely on the side of the victim.

"Oh, very good," Mrs. Cruikshanks said. "Mr. Frazer was sent to break the news of my son's death. He has told me again and again of how the—the accident happened. It is an unhappy story, but I do not tire of hearing it." Though her fingers moved over the iron wool, her eyes were fixed on the young man.

Frazer's lips parted. The warmth of Flora's voice had been like rain after months of frost, but he felt unable to take the help she offered.

"You want me to tell you again how the accident happened?" he said in a tired, hopeless voice. "We hired a punt and went up the river. He was poling, and we talked."

"What were you talking about?"

"My private affairs."

Never during the six months of his purgatory had she been able to force from him other than that reserved, "My private affairs." The gallantry of it brought an ache to Flora's throat. She knew they must have been talking of her.

"You quarrelled?"

"We differed."

"What about?"

He did not answer. Mrs. Cruikshanks was sus-

picious of the truth. She had been nosing round it for months, and she had brought Flora to the house on purpose. She looked from one to the other—false friend, treacherous, unloving wife.

Her heart was very bitter.

"We differed," Frazer said, "and I asked Cruikshanks to set me down."

The needles clicked and stabbed.

"As he turned the boat inshore, the pole slipped over something. He lost his balance and, falling overboard, upset the punt. We were not far from the bank, and I had no difficulty in scrambling out."

"You had no difficulty in scrambling out," repeated Mrs. Cruikshanks, and Flora in her corner of the sofa found herself shaking with grief and sympathy. She understood at last what the woman was doing.

"When I turned to look for Cruikshanks, he was out in midstream—"

"Sinking?"

"Sinking." He gasped. It was as if words failed him, as if he were unable to go on. Yet, when the grim head opposite nodded at him, he pulled himself together. "I—I took off my coat and—"

"You stopped to take off your coat, and—?"

"I swam to him, but he had gone down, and I could not find him." He paused to draw a deeper breath. "A boat got him, brought him ashore, but—"

"But it was too late."

"It was too late."

The trickle of words ceased, and the man lay back in his chair. The tears were running down Flora's face, but Mrs. Cruikshanks' needles flashed continually. With that iron-grey wool, with those steel needles, she was making helmets which were to protect men from the icy blasts of the North Sea.

A sob broke from Flora's lips. She got up and ran out of the room.

"Ah, poor child," commented Mrs. Cruikshanks, folding together wool and work, piercing them with the sharp needles, "how deeply she feels her loss."

XXII

"I have come to see you have everything you want," Loetitia said, as she opened the door of the austere white bedroom.

Flora was sitting on the chair by the toilet-table, her bright head on her arms, and the arms spread among a pushed-away litter of china.

"Floy!"

The other sat up, shook back her tumbling hair, and turned. "Oh, yes, I'm quite comfy," she said, "and I'm so glad I came. We have had such a delightful evening."

Closing the door, Loetitia stood with her back to it, and her attitude, Flora felt, was indicative of her feelings towards the woman on the other side of that door.

"I can't help it, Floy."

"You are letting her torture him."

"Oh, no, no. I wouldn't for the world, but I can't stop her. I—she does as she likes, she always has."

What Tish said, Billy had said. He had begged Flora to take him "out of this, for if you don't, I shall never get away. She won't let me go."

There had been no one to take Tish away.

"What is she doing?" She knew, and yet she felt she must get Tish to confirm that knowledge. It was so unbelievable.

Loetitia hesitated. "She thinks that it was Mr. Frazer's fault that dear William was drowned. Of course, it wasn't."

"No."

"She thinks"—Loetitia's voice sank to a whisper—"she thinks he ought to be hanged. She went to her lawyer, but Mr. Legge said he could not do anything. Of course he couldn't."

"No."

"So mother said she would see to it herself."

"How—how horrible!"

"I can't understand why she should want to make people suffer, for she is a good woman. She takes the Communion the first Sunday of every month."

"Oh, if that is being good—"

It was, as far as Tish was concerned. She glanced at Flora's gown. "Hadn't you better get undressed?"

The other looked surprised.

"Then I can tell mother I left you in bed."

XXIII

Loetitia tucked the blankets round her sister-in-law and turned to the gas-bracket.

"Leave it low," Floy said, "I like a glimmer."

But when the girl had returned to her mother's room, Flora got quietly out of bed and, twisting her hair into a loose knot on the nape of her neck, pulled on her black silk stockings. Stockings somehow made you feel dressed. She dare not turn up the light, but in the half-dark sought for her scarlet slippers, her long fur coat. In her mind was an old Hebrew story, the story of the bolster which was laid in David's bed to conceal his absence ; and, with a smile, she rumbled the bedclothes, made them look as if she were lying under them, asleep. She would not lock her door, better not, but she turned out the gas.

Tish had said that Frazer sat up late, writing. In such weather as this he would be in whichever room had a fire. Floy waited until she might hope Mrs. Cruikshanks was asleep, then opened her door with a steady hand.

The hinges were well oiled and there was no sound. The house lay black about her. It seemed to breathe quietly, as if it rested. Below was a well of stuffy darkness, and she felt her way down firmly and carefully. As she stepped off the last stair on to the mat, she saw a gleam of light—a line under the further door.

Frazer looked up in surprise as the handle turned

quietly and Floy came into the room. Miserable as he was, the sight of her, bundled up in the thick fur, in that undress so decent, yet so suggestive, made him forget for a moment the pass to which he had been brought.

The coat she wore was of seal, and the dark fur enhanced her beauty of vivid colouring, of bright loosened hair. Inside that soft thickness would be the warmth of her.

The table at which he sat was of mahogany, square-set on ball feet. As a rule it was covered with albums and gift books and stood against the wall, but Frazer had pulled it nearer to the fire.

Before him lay a page of virgin paper and a small, reddish fountain-pen.

"Simon," she said, "what is all this nonsense?"

Nonsense? Oh, but she could not mean it.

She was stooping towards him, and he saw that she had been crying. The edges of the girlish face were a little blurred. Crying? The horrors of the evening swam up through his mind, dead, putrid things rising to the surface. Against Flora's troubled bloom he saw them as obscene, and his heart contracted. He had feared she would hate him, but when you hate a man you do not seek him out at a time like this.

"This place is like a vault," she said. "Decent-minded people bury their dead and make a fresh start—"

"You mean they make the best of a loss?"

"I mean more than that. I mean that they put the dead into graves and leave them there. They

turn right away from them. It is ghoulish, this brooding over and living on the past. It does not seem to me quite sane. You should not have let Mrs. Cruikshanks get hold of you. It was pandering to a—a weakness."

"A weakness?" To him Mrs. Cruikshanks seemed so much the reverse of weak.

"Well then, a wickedness. It does not matter what you call it. She has a sort of diseased way of looking at things which makes her very disagreeable. I think she is a perfectly horrid old thing. But it is no good taking her seriously."

"Oh—" the word came with a gasp. Not take Mrs. Cruikshanks seriously? "I was to blame. You can't get away from that."

"No doubt you stayed on the bank a moment longer than you should have done; but Billy was pretty desperate that day. You didn't know, but he had more troubles than just his silly quarrel with you." She paused to listen.

They could hear footsteps on the landing overhead. "It is your old blood-sucker," Flora said, looking about.

"She couldn't have heard us." He, too, glanced from the wall to the window curtains, the fireplace, the bookstand.

"No, but she does not trust me. She is coming to see if you are alone."

"There is nowhere you can hide."

"Go on writing, write furiously." Stepping back, she drew herself against the wall. The open door would conceal her from anyone entering the

room and, taking the handle gently, she pulled the door back, and yet further back.

XXIV

"I thought I heard voices," Mrs. Cruikshanks said. Over her nightdress she had drawn a dark red dressing-gown, her old head was wrapped in a woollen nightcap, and on her feet were dark leather slippers which had belonged to her late husband.

Frazer had pulled out a sheet half covered with writing. He looked up from it with a frown. "Eh?"

"I thought I heard voices."

"Do you want me to go round the house?"

She stared about the room. "It appears I was mistaken," she grumbled, then grew once more suspicious. "It is cold here. Why do you sit with the door open?"

The question was an impertinence. "Have you any objection?"

She did not like his tone. Had it been, after all, a mistake to put him in touch with her light-minded daughter-in-law? "I hope the sound I heard has not disturbed Mrs. William. I will go and see."

If Flora had attempted to communicate with him, if she were not in her bed, that would alarm him, and she paused for a moment, expecting him to speak. He had turned back to his work, however, and was writing absorbedly. It was perhaps as well that she could not see the words his pen was forming.

"Oh, angel, angel—"

Mrs. Cruikshanks went up the stairs, turned the handle of Flora's door, peered into the darkness.

"Are you awake, Flora?"

The faint light from a road lamp showed a hunched figure in the bed; and the guilty couple, listening, heard presently the sound of receding steps, the shutting of the end room door. Flora, her soft furs a little flattened, stepped out. "She guesses, but it does not matter, for you are going away. Oh yes, Simon, you must. The old vampire is sucking you dry."

He lifted despairing eyes. "I—I can't."

"No doubt you had some far-fetched notion of paying a debt, but Billy was not a bit revengeful; and, though she may think she is doing this for him, she isn't. Don't you realize that she is getting a morbid pleasure out of it?"

He stirred uneasily. "I—I am drained dry," he said.

Looking into the sunken black eyes, she remembered that his tormentor had had him at her mercy for a long time. He was perhaps beyond making an effort.

Something that lay under the practical surface of her nature forced a way through. She felt a sudden tingle of warmth. Slipping an arm round his neck, she drew his dark head against her breast. "I'll help you," she promised.

XXV

When Frazer left the house on the following morning, he was a man made over. He might still be a prisoner, but he had only to assert himself. Mrs. Cruikshanks had put her finger on the weak spot in his account of poor Billy's death. She had felt certain there was something behind his story, something that he would not tell, and she was right. He had hated Billy because he was Flora's husband, and it was that hatred more than his momentary hesitation which had delivered him into the old woman's hands. For a long time before that day on the river, Frazer had been unable to think of him without longing to take him by the throat, without feeling that the time must come when he would.

He said to Flora during their long and intimate talk—that midnight talk when the house had settled to sleep—that he was blood-guilty, that he must make amends.

"But you are sorry now that you felt like that about poor dear Billy?"

"Am I?" His arm tightened about her. "You don't know me. It was hell to feel that you were married to him. I"—he put her off his knee, began to walk agitatedly to and fro—"I can't bear to look back, to think that you ever—"

"Oh, Simon, don't." He was letting her look deep into the emotional possibilities of this nature so different from hers.

She had belonged to Billy, but not in the way she would belong to Simon. She saw herself living for him, and she felt wildly glad. To give and go on giving. She wanted to; it would make life tremendously worth while.

XXVI

Frazer could not see how Flora was to effect his deliverance. The fact remained that he had hated Cruikshanks, that whenever he thought of the man, he had seen red. Nor was he sorry that Cruikshanks was dead. Look at it how you would, he had been guilty—yes, in intent.

For what you did you must pay, and he was paying. An eye for an eye. Mrs. Cruikshanks knew that and was exacting a life for a life. Between the millstones of her vindictive will, she was grinding him to powder.

Flora had told him to be of good courage, and the sight of her morning face at breakfast had brimmed his cup. As the day passed, however, hope sank little by little till, as he came down the silent road in the mirk of the January evening, he found his heart empty of everything but fear. The old woman had her claws in him, and he would never escape. Flora had come too late.

Nevertheless, he followed her practical directions and, when he came into the sitting-room that night, his box was packed, even to the last treasure of the writer, his unfinished manuscripts.

Mrs. Cruikshanks was in her usual chair, knitting up the lengths of iron wool, and, at the sight of her, he saw how absurd it was to think he might get away. His life was a bit of yielding wool, and she was twisting it as she would. A second later Flora's smile had shocked him to the realization that for her the brooding woman on the hearth was of small account—a lioness whose teeth had been drawn by age.

Mrs. Cruikshanks looked up. "Good evening, Mr. Frazer. Did you execute my little commission?"

He stopped and his heart tightened. The old woman had asked him to order for her a wreath of ivy. "I—I forgot."

"Six months ago to-day William was drowned, six—months—to-day. And you—could forget."

"Oh, but," interposed Flora, "you know how Billy hated that sort of thing. He once said to me, 'When I die, push me into any old hole and for the Lord's sake don't wear mourning for me.'"
She glanced down at the chiffon velvet of her gown. "I disobeyed him because I felt I should like to be in black for a time. One does, but I don't know why one should; after all, one colour is much the same as another."

XXVII

The New Year had come in to an accompaniment of frost and snow, and Mrs. Cruikshanks' sitting-room was as cold as it could well be. When the

little party struggled back after supper Flora, sinking into her place on the horsehair sofa, thanked her stars that the car was coming for her the following morning. She glanced through the green gloom at her mother-in-law. What a life—bitterness, heartburn, and the hope of evil. Poor, poor old creature.

Mrs. Cruikshanks was looking from under tufted, iron-grey brows at Frazer, and he was conscious of nothing but her intent look. Not even the shield of Flora's smile might come between that beak and his vitals. A thick, black oppression fell on him.

"Six months ago to-day," Mrs. Cruikshanks was saying, when Flora rose.

"How cold it is! Tish, aren't you frozen?" She had stepped forward, was standing between the old woman and Frazer. "These old-fashioned grates give out very little heat. Would you mind if I put on some more coal?"

Mrs. Cruikshanks blinked and stirred. Her strange eyes lost, as it were, their grip, and Frazer got up.

"Allow me," he said, and busied himself with the fire.

"Ah, that is better," Flora held her hands to the blaze. "Now, if only we had some chestnuts to roast."

The click of Mrs. Cruikshanks' needles ceased. She must assert herself, or she would lose her hold on Frazer. "This is an anniversary, Flora," she said, stern reproof in her voice, "the anniversary

of the day that made you a widow. I cannot think of anything but that dreadful time. Mr. Frazer—”

Flora interposed again. “It is too dreadful to talk of.”

“I want to hear once more exactly what happened.”

“Mr. Frazer gave you his version of that yesterday. If you insist on discussing the matter, you had better hear mine.”

“Thank you ; I am content to hear Mr. Frazer’s.”

“Content with an inaccurate—or no, not inaccurate, but an incomplete—account of poor Billy’s death ? ”

“Mr. Frazer’s account is that of an eye-witness.”

“He may have misinterpreted what he saw.”

Mrs. Cruikshanks was losing her temper. “Oh, nonsense.”

“Excuse me,” Flora was not to be overborne, “but certain evidence—evidence of which Mr. Frazer knows nothing, was withheld at the inquest, out of consideration for you.”

“Consideration of me ? ” Mrs. Cruikshanks was stiffly incredulous. “I shall be glad to know what it is that has been withheld from William’s mother all this time.”

“One of the people who saw the accident says that when Billy came to the surface after the punt was overturned, he deliberately struck out into the current. The man shouted to him, but he did not take any notice, and he was swept away. Billy, as you know, was a good swimmer.”

Mrs. Cruikshanks had dropped her knitting into the hollow of her lap. "I was at the inquest. There was no suggestion that my son swam into danger. Why should he?"

"My father thinks that Billy did not want to live."

The old woman caught her up sharply. "Did not want to live?"

The room was hushed to a tense attentiveness, and the quaver in Flora's low voice was audible to all. "He thinks that—that he, oh, poor Billy—that, like his father, he committed suicide."

XXVIII

"Committed suicide."

The spoken word seemed to take form among them, releasing Frazer, falling on Mrs. Cruikshanks like an authoritative hand, one that was pressing her towards an open darkness.

"How," she said, and her voice had a broken sound, "how could anyone say anything so wicked?"

Flora shook her head. She had nerved herself to go through with the matter. If Mrs. Cruikshanks' heart had not been filled with malice and all uncharitableness, the truth might have slept in Billy's grave.

"Billy was unlucky—"

"A man does not commit suicide because he has been unfortunate in a business venture," but she spoke uncertainly.

"Billy had been very unfortunate."

Mrs. Cruikshanks shivered. The room was certainly cold, and that was odd, for the fire, piled high, was flaming up the chimney.

"He was on the verge of bankruptcy, and it was not an ordinary bankruptcy—"

The old woman made a stifled sound, and from her lap the knitting—shining needles piercing iron-grey wool—slipped, to lie disregarded on the floor.

"Billy was trustee for his cousins, Mary and Nita Cruikshanks. He speculated with their money and lost it."

"That is a wicked lie!"

"My father has paid the money back. I can show you the papers."

Silence fell on that utterance, but presently Flora said pitifully: "If he had known, my father would have helped, but he had urged Billy not to speculate, and I suppose Billy thought there was no one to whom he could turn."

"I—" began Mrs. Cruikshanks creakily.

But again Flora shook her head. "You would not help his father, you know. Billy could not feel—remembering that—that it would be any use coming to you."

XXIX

Mrs. Cruikshanks had fallen together, a scarecrow, the prop of which, rotted by weather, has broken; but Frazer was on his feet. Taking from his pocket a banknote, he laid it on the table in

lieu of notice and turned to Flora. "To-morrow," he said quietly, and as quietly she assented.

They heard him running up the stairs like a boy. The slam of the front door shook the house.

"Good-night!" said Flora, looking from the dark bundle hunched together on the straight hard chair to Loetitia's frightened face. As she went towards the door, Mrs. Cruikshanks raised her head. The small easy tears of senility had wetted the grey cheeks, but her quiver was not entirely empty.

"You," she said rancorously, "how you loved your husband!"

THE END





